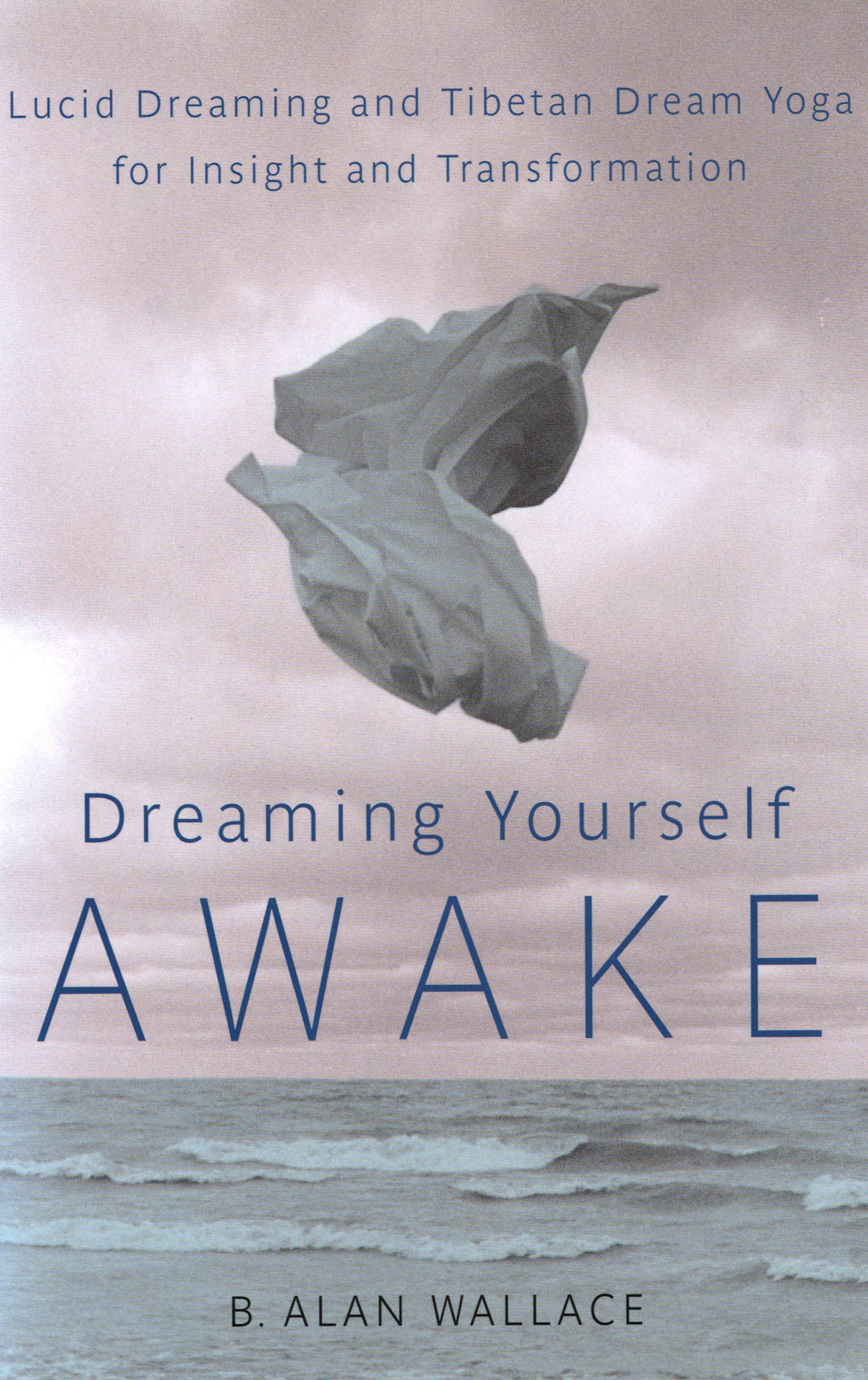


Lucid Dreaming and Tibetan Dream Yoga for Insight and Transformation

Dreaming Yourself AWAKE

B. ALAN WALLACE

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Contents

Introduction

In all the great spiritual traditions where meditation plays an important role, the watchword is "Awaken!" This call is echoed in the Western science of psychology. The implication is that throughout our lives we've been asleep—in essence, dreaming. Of course if we sleepwalk through life we will invariably stub our toes on unseen realities. Given life's uncertainties, we need to be as awake as possible to its opportunities and dangers. *Dreaming Yourself Awake* is directed as much to our awakening from life-as-a-dream as it is to our becoming lucidly aware as we dream at night. Both situations, and our awakening within them, are intimately connected. Such an awakening brings with it the clarity and freedom that form the basis for genuine happiness.

How are spiritual awakening and lucid dreaming connected? In both cases you are poignantly aware of the unfolding of your experiences in the present moment. You are not carried away by distractive thoughts and emotions. You can observe their appearance, continuity, transformation, and fading with perfect clarity. Like a chess grand master, your mind is fully focused—sure and unclouded. Such clarity is a gateway to inner freedom. Awake to the potential of every situation, you become the master of your destiny. Dream practice can heighten creativity, solve problems, heal emotions, or provide scintillating inner theater—the ultimate in entertainment. It can also be a valuable aid to the attainment of spiritual awakening.

Once greater control has been developed you can use the dream space as a laboratory to achieve psychological insights, overcome fears, do creative work, entertain yourself, or meditate in the virtual environment of your choosing.

The science of lucid dreaming is a recently developed system of theory and practice within the field of psychology. Although he had important predecessors, Stephen LaBerge, who received his PhD in psychology from Stanford University, is the foremost exponent of lucid dreaming. In the late 1980s, LaBerge, while doing graduate research at Stanford, became the first to prove to the scientific community that one can be consciously aware while dreaming. Although many people had reported lucid dreams through the ages, psychologists assumed these were false memories—that people had actually awakened at night and in the morning mistakenly believed they had been conscious of dreaming. LaBerge is extremely gifted as a lucid dreamer and is able to have lucid dreams at will, an ability he had naturally as a child but which was lost during adolescence, then deliberately regained as a graduate student. As part of his research he devised a method of making specific eye movements while he dreamed so that his fellow researchers would know he was awake within his dreams. This method proved the existence of lucid dreaming.[1]

While at Stanford, LaBerge developed more effective means of awakening in his dreams and sustaining and vivifying them. Continued research, including interaction with interested lay persons, led to the publication of several popular books on lucid dreaming (including *Lucid Dreaming, Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, and *Lucid Dreaming: A Concise Guide to Awakening in Your Dreams and in Your Life*). Due in large part to LaBerge's work, the reality of lucid dreaming has been generally acknowledged in the field of psychology. I met Stephen LaBerge in 1992 when I was a graduate student in religious studies at Stanford. My research centered on the contemplative development of attention. When Stephen and I talked about our

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along with conscious and unconscious mental phenomena—thoughts, feelings, sensations, and so forth. This is our ordinary, conditioned mind. The psyche emanates from a deeper, intermediate level, the *substrate consciousness.* This is described as a subtle mind stream containing latent habits, tendencies, and attitudes tracing back to previous lifetimes. The deepest and most fundamental layer, *primordial consciousness*—encompassing both the psyche and the substrate consciousness—is an ultimate level of pure wisdom where the "inner" (mind) and "outer" (phenomenal world) are nondual. The realization of primordial consciousness is the gateway to full enlightenment.

Dream yoga seeks to gradually penetrate to primordial consciousness by way of realizing that everything, oneself included, emerges from and is of the nature of this primordial, enlightened ground. The specific practices of dream yoga enable one to explore and deeply understand the nature and origin of the mental phenomena of the psyche, to penetrate to its source—the substrate consciousness, or ground of the ordinary mind—and finally to recognize and dwell in primordial consciousness. Although it initiates this process during sleep and dreams, dream yoga involves practices employed during the daytime and aims to awaken our entire life—day and night—from the sleep of *samsara.*

My first encounter with dream yoga came in 1978, when I acted as a translator for Westerners attending teachings on dream yoga by Zong Rinpoche, an eminent Tibetan lama. He explained that dream yoga is one of a group of advanced practices called the Six Yogas of Naropa and that it requires a strong foundation in meditation. Following that advice, I engaged in foundational practices before attempting dream yoga. In 1990 I received dream yoga instruction from another revered Tibetan teacher, Gyatrul Rinpoche. Two years later a friend requested that I teach him dream yoga. I asked Gyatrul Rinpoche if I should teach it, and he gave me his permission. Over the years that I have practiced and taught dream yoga, my sense of reverence and

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for everyone. Some of us fall asleep easily. Some don't. Some of us can remember our dreams more easily than others. Although a general sleep cycle for human beings has been discovered by psychologists, there are subtle differences among individuals. Practices and points of view that work well with one personality may be confusing and inappropriate for another. Therefore, woven into this text, I provide guidance in this area by illustrating some of these differences and proposing alternative practices—fine-tuning that will help you maximize your effectiveness as a dream yogi, a lucid dreamer. In addition to this I provide a chapter with questions and responses drawn from my retreats on lucid dreaming and dream yoga.

The good news is that whatever our limitations, awakening within dreams can be learned by anyone willing to make the effort. The key to both lucid dreaming and dream yoga—the essential ingredient that will propel us beyond the murky somnambulance of our habits—is motivation. If we become inspired to practice and committed to this inner exploration, we will succeed.

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PART ONE

Lucid Dreaming

1

Meditative Quiescence

Laying the Groundwork for Lucidity

WHAT ESSENTIAL ELEMENT distinguishes a lucid dream from an ordinary dream? In a lucid dream you are aware, in real time, of the nature of the reality you are experiencing. You know that you are dreaming. You know that your body is lying in bed, asleep, even as you participate in dream episodes that range from the ordinary to the utterly fantastic. You know that all of the phenomena of your dream—the scenery and participants—are the creations of your own mind. Whereas in a nonlucid dream you take everything, no matter how bizarre it may seem, at face value—never suspecting you are asleep—in a lucid dream you know, then and there, that it's just a dream.

Ordinarily our dreams are characterized by a lack of stability. Our attention is pulled hither and yon by the contents of our dreams and our habitual reactions to these events. Shamatha is a practice that stabilizes our attention. Stability of attention is a crucial step to freedom—the freedom to transcend normal dream consciousness and recognize we are dreaming, then to maintain that lucidity, and to transform our dreams into a laboratory where we can carefully explore the mind. By gradually learning to focus our attention, confusion is replaced by an

The same holds for another technique we will learn later: using typical dream events (called dream signs) to remind us while asleep that we are experiencing a dream. Over time, we can compile a list of events that occur regularly in our dreams. We may, for instance, repeatedly find ourselves in a specific location, or encounter a certain situation or the same people or objects. If we have the mental clarity to remember the importance of these signs when they appear in our dreams, that can prompt us to awaken within them. Shamatha training significantly increases the chances of this happening, whereas lacking this training, in our normal dream consciousness we are more likely to either miss these cues completely or have only a vague sensation that they are supposed to have some meaning or application.

Shamatha training is not exclusive to Buddhism. It is found in contemplative Christianity, Hinduism, Sufism, Taoism, and elsewhere. I believe, however, that Buddhism has produced a well-elaborated and broad-based shamatha program that is especially suitable for dream practice. The version I will present here draws on a tradition that makes use of three specific techniques within a framework of ten successive stages. First I will give a brief presentation of the theory of this Buddhist version of shamatha and then an overview of the more practical adaptations of this theory that we can make use of to develop skill in lucid dreaming and dream yoga.

Shamatha in Theory

The overall framework for shamatha training presented here is drawn from *Stages of Meditation,* by the eighth-century Indian Buddhist contemplative Kamalashila. There are ten stages, beginning with the coarsest of attentional states and leading up to the most subtle—the achievement of shamatha itself. With the achievement of shamatha, the practitioner will be able to concentrate effortlessly on a chosen object continuously for at least

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7. *Fully Pacified Attention*—Attachment, melancholy, and lethargy are pacified.
8. *Single-Pointed Attention*—Samadhi is sustained without excitation or laxity.
9. *Attentional Balance*—Flawless, effortlessly sustained samadhi.
10. *Shamatha*—One can effortlessly maintain concentration on an object for at least four hours; this is accompanied by greatly increased mental and physical pliancy and other positive side effects.[3]

The main metaphor applied to these ten successive stages is the relative turbulence of a river. In the beginning, thoughts, emotions, images, and so forth course through the mind with the power of a cascading waterfall. In later stages, these mental phenomena appear with diminished force and frequency—more like a broad, calm river—until they are finally pacified completely as in a placid sea.

Three Sequential Practices on the Path of Shamatha

I have found these three practices to be the most effective ones for modern people engaged in shamatha training. The first is *mindfulness of breathing.* Here one develops one's attention by observing the inhalations and exhalations, passively witnessing the tactile sensations throughout the body associated with natural breathing. The experience of the breath provides an excellent grounding, allowing physical and mental relaxation to become the basis of the practice from the very beginning. For those committed to the full shamatha training described above, I recommend that mindfulness of breathing be practiced in

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prelude for getting a good night's sleep, without which successful dream practice is difficult if not impossible. We will begin this and future sessions by *settling the body in its natural state.* Then, cultivating a quality of quiet, mindful presence, we will allow awareness to permeate the field of tactile sensations—those sensations arising on both the interior and the periphery of the body.

Once you have found a **comfortable posture,** do your best to remain still, apart from the movement of the breath. If sitting (on a chair or cross-legged on the floor), see that your spine is straight and your sternum uplifted just enough so that there is no pressure on your abdomen that would prevent it from expanding freely as you breathe in. Keep your abdominal muscles loose, feeling your belly expand with each inhalation. Wherever you find tension or tightness in the body, breathe into that area and, especially when you breathe out, release the muscular tension. Pay particular attention to the muscles of the face—the jaw, the eyes. Round off this initial settling of the body by taking **three slow, deep, luxurious breaths,** breathing through the nostrils, down into the belly, expanding the diaphragm, and finally breathing into the chest, breathing in almost to full capacity and then releasing the breath effortlessly, mindfully attentive to the sensations correlated with the breath as they manifest throughout the entire body.

Next, **settle your respiration in its natural rhythm,** noting how easy it is to influence the breath with your preferences. To the best of your ability, withdraw your control and allow the respiration to flow of its own accord, with no intervention, as effortlessly as possible.

When we begin learning meditation, we quickly discover just how agitated and cluttered our minds are. We are sometimes inundated with a cascading flow of thoughts and emotions. Cultivate a **positive attitude,** one of patience, when you encounter these distractions. Rather than reacting by trying to clamp down and force the mind to be still, **relax and let go** of

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- Attention: on the field of tactile sensations
- When distracted: gently return attention to the tactile field of sensations
- Length: one ghatika (twenty-four minutes)
- Intention: to observe tactile sensations, relax and return to them when distracted

Commentary

The basic technique of shamatha involves the interaction of two mental faculties: mindfulness and introspection. *Mindfulness* can be defined as continuous attention to a chosen object, which requires that one remember what the task is and not become distracted by other phenomena. *Introspection* (as the eighth-century Indian Buddhist adept Shantideva defined it) is "the repeated examination of the state of one's body and mind."[6] Therefore introspection allows for a kind of quality control, recognizing when one's attention strays and alerting mindfulness to reassert itself. One focuses one's mind using mindfulness to remember the task, and when attention strays introspection takes notice so that one can guide oneself back to the object of attention. *Remember* your intention and *check* to see that you are accomplishing it moment-by-moment.

I have a strong hunch that the manner of our breathing when we are in dreamless sleep is very restorative for the mind and body. When we are dreaming, our thoughts and emotions can interfere with our breathing. Most of us have awakened from a nightmare—perhaps one where we are being chased by something frightening—to find ourselves breathing laboriously. In dreamless sleep our compulsive thinking—hopes and fears, grasping and anticipation, and emotional activity—is dormant. Using the practice above, we can induce this restorative breathing by relaxing through the entire exhalation and then—rather than sucking in—simply allowing the inhalation to flow in passively. We gently surrender all control of the

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to arise in the body and the mind. We facilitate this especially by relaxing with each exhaltion, letting go of excess muscular tension, immediately releasing any involuntary thoughts or images that arise in the mind—releasing them and immediately letting the awareness descend back into the field of tactile sensations.

A sense of ease and relaxation is indispensable for cultivating attention skills and for dream practice. But by itself it's not enough. We need to also introduce **the element of stability**—the voluntary continuity of attention. So let's step up this practice now by narrowing the focus of attention. Instead of focusing on the whole body or letting the attention rove within the body, now zero in more steadily on the tactile sensations of the rise and fall of the abdomen with each inhalation and exhalation. Narrow your focus. Continue to let the breath flow unimpeded, without constraint or effort, and with bare attention simply attend to the sensations themselves, with no conceptual overlay, no cogitation—just the sensations in the area of the abdomen corresponding to the flow of the breath.

Note the duration of each inhalation and exhalation, whether it is short or long. Continue relaxing with each exhalation, thereby **overcoming** the **agitation,** the excitation of the mind. But with each inhalation **arouse your attention,** thereby overcoming laxity and dullness. So in this way each full cycle of the breath is like a complete meditation session in itself, designed to overcome excitation and laxity and to cultivate stability and vividness. As the mind becomes calm, the attention more and more stabilized, you may find this enhances the degree of relaxation and looseness in the body and mind. At the same time, the greater the sense of relaxation in the body and mind, the easier it is to stabilize the attention. There is a synergy between these two qualities. Continue alternating relaxation and arousal of attention on the exhalations and inhalations.

And now, to help stem the flow of obsessive thinking, of being compulsively carried away by thoughts, you may find it helpful, at least occasionally, to count the breaths—to substitute many

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usually encounter is the sheer volume of mental "noise" that clutters awareness when one begins to meditate. Although it may appear that the practice itself has introduced these distractions, they have been there all along, taken for granted as part of the normal functioning of our minds. Soon we discover there are two major types of distraction that cause us to forget our task: *agitation* and *dullness*. For most of us, agitation is our biggest initial problem in focusing on a chosen object. We are in the habit of thinking rapidly, flitting among a variety of subjects—answering phone calls, chatting, surfing the internet, multitasking. We have developed a craving for objects and experiences that demands a lot of activity. Asking ourselves to suddenly slow down and focus on our breath is asking a lot.

When we are not agitated, we are often dull—fatigued from the fast, stressful pace of modern life. At these times, when we try to meditate, we find our focus hazy. The object of attention lacks vividness. We tune out, surfacing minutes later from daydreams or sleep. What we must seek then is a middle ground between agitation and dullness. To prepare this middle ground, from the start we foster the attitudes of relaxation, stillness, and vigilance. Relaxation and stillness counter agitation, while vigilance counteracts dullness. With these in mind, we are gradually able to experience moments of clarity—a respite from our normal mental flow of alternating agitation and dullness.

Session Three: Vividness of Attention

Here we will pass through the first two phases of attention on the tactile field of sensations of the body and attention on the rise and fall of the abdomen, and enter phase three—the development of vividness of attention.

Settle the body once again in its natural state, letting awareness permeate the whole field of the body, setting the body at ease, in stillness, in a posture of vigilance. If you find it helpful, take three slow, deep breaths to round off this initial settling of

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the sensations of the in- and outflow of the breath at the apertures of the nostrils. Focus your attention on the difference in temperature between the sensations of the inhalation at the nostrils and the warmer exhalation. As your breathing becomes quieter and more refined, this difference will become more and more subtle, challenging you to become more vividly aware.

Out of sheer habit, involuntary thoughts are bound to come tumbling out one after another; the mind will keep rambling on. Again, in order to stem this involuntary flow of thoughts, images, and memories, you may find it helpful again to count the breaths, to break up the involuntary flow of thoughts. With one count at the end of each inhalation, just before the exhalation begins, crystallize your attention, and then mindfully attend to the sensations of the breath throughout the whole course of the exhalation. Even if there is a pause at the end of the exhalation, you may still detect sensations there at the apertures of the nostrils. Continue attending to them and then to the sensations of the whole course of the inhalation, followed by a brief count. To the best of your ability, maintain a continuous flow of mindfulness; engage with the ongoing flow of sensations at the apertures of the nostrils. In this way you exercise and enhance the faculty of mindfulness.

In the practice of shamatha we **enhance and develop the faculty of mindfulness,** and also that of introspection—our ability to monitor the state of the mind, to monitor the meditative process so that we quickly recognize when the mind has been caught up in thoughts and carried away or when the mind is simply slipping into dullness or laxity, perhaps on the way to falling asleep. As soon as you recognize with your faculty of introspection that your attention has become agitated, carried away, caught up in thoughts, let your first response be to relax deeply, release the thought, and immediately re-engage with the sensations of the breath. But first of all relax—loosen up.

And as soon as you recognize with your faculty of introspection that your mind is losing its clarity, falling into laxity or

the sensations of the in- and outflow of the breath at the apertures of the nostrils. Focus your attention on the difference in temperature between the sensations of the inhalation at the nostrils and the warmer exhalation. As your breathing becomes quieter and more refined, this difference will become more and more subtle, challenging you to become more vividly aware.

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And as soon as you recognize with your faculty of introspection that your mind is losing its clarity, falling into laxity or

and delve deeply into that softness, looseness, and relaxation. Observe then how stability can emerge out of that great sense of ease. You can remain quite centered and focused without clamping down with tighter and tighter concentration. So relaxation and stability balance each other. Most people, when they have their first lucid dream, notice some anomaly, some odd object or event in their dream that catalyzes the awareness that they are dreaming. Then they become so excited that two seconds later they are awake. Stability born of relaxation will enable you to be grounded rather than overexcited, prolonging lucid dreams.

The second balancing act is between stability and vividness. Just as it is important that stability not be gained at the expense of relaxation, increased vividness must not weaken stability. Here you increase the clarity, luminosity, and brightness but without giving rise to agitation that would cause you to lose your coherence. The technique for increasing vividness is to focus your attention on a subtler object, such as the sensations of the breath in the area of the nostrils. It takes greater attention to follow these sensations than the relatively coarser movement of the abdomen during respiration. If introspection signals that your level of vividness is causing agitation, back off, relax, and increase stability. The overall strategy, then, is to allow stability to develop from relaxation and vividness to emerge from stability.

Naturally, each meditator's approach to these three shamatha techniques will vary according to the degree of attentiveness, agitation, and laxity we bring initially to the practice. These are qualities of our minds at present—the product of our mental habits and experience. By trying each of these techniques, alternating them, and so forth, you will gradually gain insight into your strengths and weaknesses and will refine your meditation routine appropriately, using the suggestions above as your guide. Later in the book, I will introduce other practices that will further refine your ability to accomplish the tasks required for lucid dreaming and dream yoga.

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2

The Theory of Lucid Dreaming

THE STUDY OF LUCID DREAMING began in earnest three decades ago within the field of sleep research, a branch of psychology. The best-known researchers in the field include Stephen LaBerge, Paul Tholey, Harald von Moers-Messmer, G. Scott Sparrow, and Keith Hearne.[1] Western psychology only accepted the validity of lucid dreaming in the late 1980s when LaBerge proved its existence in a laboratory experiment. Previously, psychologists had taken it for granted that being asleep and being conscious were mutually exclusive mental states, despite the fact that lucid dreams are not uncommon. Although the work of Stephen LaBerge and others has popularized lucid dreaming to some degree among the general public, to date research on lucid dreaming has not become a major scientific endeavor.

The grudging acceptance afforded lucid dreaming by psychology is not surprising. The Western science of psychology is itself only 140 years old and continues to struggle for respect within the scientific community. Given its mainly materialistic focus, science has always been reluctant to examine nonmaterial phenomena such as the mind. Indeed, in neuroscience especially, scientists have sought to define the mind and mental

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What a contrast this is to Eastern psychology and in particular to the history, theory, and practices of Buddhist dream yoga. Psychology, the study of the mind, was a central issue—perhaps *the* central issue—for Buddhism ever since Shakyamuni Buddha began teaching in India 2,500 years ago. Because according to the Buddhist viewpoint the world of *experience* is the gateway to knowledge, the idea that the mind might be a physical entity was not seriously considered. The contents and interrelationships of mental phenomena were of supreme importance to understanding both the mind and the physical universe. It would be fair to say that if ancient Buddhists had been presented with telescopes and microscopes, they would have been profoundly interested not only in the things that might be seen through them but also in the relationships among those data, the nature of the instruments, and the minds observing them.[2]

When we arrive at dream yoga, we will be studying theories and practices derived from the Six Yogas of Naropa,[3] dating from the eleventh century, as well as the presentation of dream yoga within the Six Bardos taught in the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.[4] Dream yoga has been passed down for a millennium within an empirically based tradition where the student follows the guidance of an experienced and knowledgeable teacher in the transformation and exploration of states of consciousness. Although scientific instruments are not used to prove the experiences of dream yoga, they are replicable and can be made public through the probing questions of the teacher and the detailed descriptions of the student. Anyone who wishes to make the effort can then experience them for themselves. This, then, is an "objective" or "scientific" approach on a par with LaBerge's proof of lucid dreaming. His experience was purely subjective—no one else could directly observe it. His ingenious method of demonstrating he was both asleep and conscious is in the same class as the empirical methods used by dream yogis to verify their subjective experiences. Just as LaBerge's proof was

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asleep with little mental activity, disengaged from one's physical surroundings. This is followed by NREM 3 and NREM 4, characterized by deeper sleep and exhibiting regular, large, slow, delta brain wave patterns. All of these are essentially dreamless stages of sleep. Blood pressure drops and breathing slows. This is also the deepest and most restorative sleep.[5]

Initially, after thirty to forty minutes of delta sleep, one enters REM sleep. This is where dreams occur. The sequence of the stages of sleep, then, is NREM 1, 2, 3, 4, REM. During REM sleep the body is immobilized in a type of muscle paralysis called *atonia.* The first period of REM sleep is short—five or ten minutes. One then repeats the entire cycle over and over in approximately ninety-minute cycles. The proportionate length of the REM periods increases throughout the night, with the total time in REM accounting for 25 percent of a night's sleep. (This regular profile is extremely useful as a basis for one technique of stimulating lucidity in dreams, described below.) The sleeper usually awakens briefly fifteen times or more during the night, though these awakenings are rarely noticed. They, too, can be used to enhance the practice of lucid dreaming. Furthermore, it has been discovered that the sense of the passage of time within lucid dreams closely approximates the sense of time in the waking state. If it seems you have dreamed for half an hour, that is probably the case.

Dream Consciousness

In the words of Stephen LaBerge, "dreaming can be viewed as the special case of perception without the constraints of external sensory input. Conversely, perception can be viewed as the special case of dreaming constrained by sensory input."[6] According to that statement both states of consciousness—perception when dreaming and when awake—are very similar, with overlapping networks of correlated brain mechanisms. And both states can potentially be just as clear, just as "awake."

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with the body). Furthermore, other creatures perceive photons, sound waves, and other sense data in ways that are sometimes radically different from ours. Just imagine the variety of odors experienced by dogs. So the qualities of the objects we perceive arise in dependence upon our minds and bodies in interaction with the environment. To believe otherwise is to live under the spell of an illusion—one that pervades both our waking and dreaming consciousness. Seen from this perspective, the effect of conditioning on our perceptions creates a dreamlike reality. Humans dream of human realities, but dogs may dream in scents, whales of underwater songs.

When we are awake we experience the world according to our conditioning. For example, we gained some of our initial experiences of gravity as toddlers when we learned to walk. We fell frequently—some "force" kept pulling us down when we lost our balance. The whole notion of balance in sitting up, standing, walking, and running involves an active interplay with gravity. So gravity—whatever that is (there are several scientific hypotheses)—is a physical constraint experienced with waking consciousness. We became conditioned to it in specific ways when we learned to move about as children. In dreams, however, it is possible to escape the law of gravity. Physical laws don't apply in the nonphysical realm of dreams, in which floating in the air and flying through space are not unusual. In lucid dream training, one of the earliest acquired skills is to fly at will. So, as Stephen LaBerge suggests above, dreams are a mode of experience not constrained by physical input from the environment.

It might be more accurate to say that dream consciousness is not as rigidly conditioned as waking consciousness. In fact, lucid dreamers sometimes have to train themselves to fly. The notion of gravity is so ingrained that it may carry over into the dream state. In that case a lucid dreamer may need to learn to fly in stages, gaining confidence that in the dream realm one won't come crashing down and injure oneself. Because one *believes* that gravity prohibits one from flying, one can't fly. Overcome

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lucid dreaming has evolved a number of effective strategies for combating this state of torpor.

The Power of Motivation

One is not likely to get very far in lucid dreaming by taking a casual attitude. Many of the practices of lucid dreaming derive their effectiveness from a positive, proactive motivation based on an intense interest and desire to achieve and develop lucid dreaming. This approach is found in dream yoga as well. Apprentice dream yogis are encouraged to prep themselves with strong and repeated statements such as, "Tonight I definitely will recognize the dream state!" spoken out loud prior to sleep. Lucid dreaming uses a number of such strategies enacted both in the daytime and at bedtime to increase the chances of lucid dreaming. These have a sound basis in common reminders we use to awaken at a specific time. When necessary, many of us are able to awaken at a predetermined hour in the morning without the use of an alarm clock. If, for instance, we are traveling and forget to bring an alarm clock, and we need to catch an early flight, we can awaken through the power of a strong suggestion: "I must get up at 6 A.M.!" The same internal mechanism enables mothers to awaken spontaneously at a specific hour early in the morning to feed their babies. It has to be done, so they do it.

Another useful way to prime ourselves for lucid dreaming is to anticipate lucid dreams during our waking hours. At intervals throughout the day we imagine ourselves becoming lucid during a dream. We may imagine a recent dream and see ourselves becoming lucid—perhaps triggered by something odd or impossible that occurred in the dream. This kind of anticipation is especially effective if we do it as we are falling asleep.

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other word, perhaps "mob" or "mop," or something completely different. Another difference between dreaming and the waking state, as mentioned previously, is gravity. In a dream, if you jump straight up, you will likely descend at a slower rate than during the waking state. Using the above example, then you would prep yourself by affirming, "The next time I see a white rabbit I will jump up in the air. If I float or descend more slowly than usual, I will know I am dreaming and become lucid." Eventually you will do just that. When you have gathered in your dream journal a number of personal dream signs verified by repeated appearances, you possess a very useful tool for awakening within your dreams. Stephen LaBerge, who developed this approach, calls it MILD—Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams. The dream sign is a mnemonic device prompting a specific response through prospective memory.

As you become skilled in remembering your dreams you will begin to notice oddities or *anomalies*—things that are so bizarre that it is surprising you don't question them as you dream along, believing your dreams are real. Anomalies, ranging from flying elephants to green sunsets to the appearance of deceased relatives to nightmares inhabited by fantastic creatures, occur in most people's dreams at least from time to time, but our normal dream state, dominated by dullness and amnesia, prevents us from questioning them. In other words, there is something missing here—we lack a *critical reflective attitude*. During normal waking experience we maintain a certain degree of skepticism garnered from our life experience. We all develop our own conception of what is possible in life. If a salesman offered us a new car for ten dollars or we saw a flying elephant, most of us would immediately become skeptical, if not a bit worried about our sanity. Such phenomena would be considered very odd—the kind of thing that happens only in imagination or in dreams.

The cumulative effect of the strategies described above is to awaken our critical reflective attitude, to make us sensitive to oddities we frequently experience while dreaming that could

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The approach of surfacing and then reentering sleep is called WILD—Wake-Initiated Lucid Dreams.

Another version of WILD is to follow the hypnagogic imagery that often appears as we fall asleep. These images range from partial dreamlike scenes to elaborate geometric patterns. They are very subtle and require relaxation and sensitivity to perceive, but if you can maintain gentle attention on them once you see them, you can fall asleep consciously and experience both dreams and non-REM sleep lucidly.

Training in the Dream

It is an exciting experience to have your first lucid dream—especially if it is accomplished intentionally. In fact it is so exciting, bizarre, unexpected, and energizing that you usually awaken after only a few seconds of lucid dreaming. So the next step is to develop some stability, increase your "flight time." One contributing factor that cannot be overlooked is your ability to sleep regularly. If you can't get a good night's sleep, developing stability in lucid dreaming is impossible. In the next chapter I will offer suggestions and exercises that will help you fall asleep more easily and extend your sleep time.

Techniques such as those outlined above, if practiced diligently, will eventually enable you to engage in lucid dreaming more frequently. Thereafter to extend or stabilize lucid dreams requires that you (1) keep the dream going (don't wake up or fall into dreamless sleep), and (2) maintain lucidity (don't fall into ordinary, nonlucid dreaming). Once you are able to maintain a lucid dream for more than a few seconds, you may notice the dream scenario begins to break up. The images lose their sharpness and cohesiveness. There are a number of techniques you can apply via your "dream body" to stimulate your senses and revive the integrity of dream contents. Techniques derived from meditation for creating vividness of consciousness can also be

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flights), fingering invisible pianos, violins, and so forth, while imagining or hearing mentally the music they are practicing. All of these techniques can be applied to even greater advantage in lucid dreaming because you can create the perfect virtual environments for training. If you've always wanted to play a Stradivarius, you can have one!

You can also create and program fantasies and adventures in lucid dreams. Anything you can see on television, the silver screen, in a video game, or read in a book can be done in the creative realm of lucid dreaming. You can play the lead in a self-created drama—or be all the actors. You can go backward or forward in time as if you were playing a DVD. Your imagination is the only limit as to how you can entertain yourself.

Personally, I prefer to view lucid dreaming as a laboratory for exploring the mind. If you take, say, a Western psychological viewpoint, lucid dreaming can allow you to explore your fears, neuroses, psychological obstacles, and so forth. If you are having difficulty interacting with a boss, coworker, or other acquaintance, you can conjure up that person in your dreams and rehearse your interactions. Even unfinished business with a deceased relative can be reenacted in a lucid dream because in the dream space you can bring that person (as you conceive of or remember that person) back to life. In the process of such explorations you may learn new things about yourself. A fear of heights can be worked through by re-creating threatening situations in lucid dreams. You can practice walking over tall bridges, experiencing the sense of height while simultaneously aware that it is all a dreamscape. You can jump off the bridge if you like, and you will merely float down to "earth." The possibilities for therapeutic role-playing are endless.

In dream practice there are techniques by which you can perform a variety of transformations that challenge and stretch the limits of your identity. What are the boundaries of the ego we label "I"? What would it be like to go beyond them? This is essentially a spiritual question. In many contemplative religious

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The Practice of Lucid Dreaming

No Sleep, No Dreams

It's no surprise that many of us don't sleep as well as we would like or get as much sleep as we need. Whether you live in New York or Beijing, the stress and long working hours that epitomize the modern lifestyle interfere with the natural sleep pattern. Statistics from 2008 show that fifty to seventy million Americans have chronic sleep and wakefulness disorders, with twenty-nine million U.S. adults reporting they sleep less than seven hours per night.[1] Many of us must wake up early, joining the morning rush to jobs that are often a rush unto themselves. We are bombarded by worrisome news about politics, economics, and health. Social transformations often rock our relationships with friends, family, and partners. We seem to be harried from all sides. Paradoxically, to cope with all of this stress, a good night's sleep is just what the doctor ordered. Another excellent remedy for coping with the vicissitudes of life is shamatha meditation. Practicing this technique at bedtime will help you sleep longer and more soundly as well as prepare you for lucid dreaming.

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exhalations may be long or short; there may be pauses now and again. Observe the sensations of the breath closely but passively; relinquish all preferences. Let the body breathe of its own accord.

Allow the tightness of the body to melt away with each exhalation, and, as if it were a gust of wind blowing away dry leaves, simply **release any involuntary thoughts, mental images, or activities of the mind.** Let them go, breathe out with a sigh of relief, as if to say, "I don't have to think all of the time, sometimes it's OK to be quiet," and just be present, mindfully attentive to the tactile sensations arising throughout the body, especially those correlated with the breath. This is a time for quiescence rather than stimulation—a time simply to be present rather than active or reactive. With each exhalation, deeply let go in body and mind. Continue releasing and relaxing all the way through the exhalation, until the inhalation flows in as effortlessly and spontaneously as a wave washing up on the shore.

When you become drowsy, roll over into your normal sleeping position, and allow yourself to drift off to sleep.

OUTLINE OF THE PRACTICE:

- Posture: supine (on your back, arms flared out slightly)
- Body settled in its natural state
- Breathing settled in its natural rhythm
- Mental activity released with the breath
- Intention: to relax away all physical and mental activity and tension as preparation for a good night's sleep

Getting Started with Lucid Dreaming

The first step toward lucid dreaming is to generate interest in your dreams. If you don't have a natural curiosity about your sleeping and dreaming, think about this: should you live to the age of ninety, about thirty years—an entire third of your life—will pass in your sleep. All of those years you will spend in a

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sleep. Even if you remember this task a few seconds after you have awakened, it is already too late. You might be able to catch some of your dream, but the chances diminish the longer you wait. When trying to remember dreams it is also important to maintain a relaxed mind. If we become tense or overexcited due to high expectations, our thoughts may interfere with the images we seek to recall.

If you are unable to get very far in your task of remembering a dream, there are questions you can pose that may jog your memory. If you've picked up the tail end of a dream, ask yourself, "Where was I, and what was happening just before that? How did I get there? Why was I there? What did I want? What was I fleeing from? What was I chasing after?" Get in the habit of asking such questions when you get stuck. But remembering even a piece of your dream would be quite a bit for your first night of dream practice. If you were able to remain still upon waking, and remember why you did so, you have opened the door to the use of prospective memory in lucid dreaming. You made a date with yourself to do something in the future, and you did it. That is an important step.

Once you are able to get even a single fragment from any dream you've had during the night, write it in your dream journal. As we continue training in this way, our memory for dreams will improve. In the beginning we may operate in the following manner: "OK, I'm beginning to wake up. I will remain motionless—that's the first task. Now, what's the second? Oh yeah, try to remember what I was dreaming. What was my last thought, last image—my last experience? Maybe it was a dream image, a dream experience." So you keep casting back, fishing for material. If something doesn't come immediately, keep on trying. By doing so, eventually it will work. "Can I remember *anything* since I fell asleep last night? Any images? Any story? Any emotions? Anything at all?" If you pick up the end of a dream, concentrate on that, thinking, for example, "OK, that was a dream.

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The Dream Journal

Before long you will be able to remember longer and longer passages from multiple dreams, if not entire dreams. From the beginning of this process, keep a notebook close by your bed and as soon as you have remembered as much dream material as you can for a given night or period of the night, write it down in as much detail as possible. I have seen people who began with zero dream recall remembering four or five dreams per night. Some participants in a three-month retreat I once led spent forty-five minutes to an hour each morning writing out all the dream material from the previous night. By the time you have gotten really good at this, perhaps in a month or two, you can stop writing. You'll then be able to remember your dreams very easily. The written material you've accumulated will be employed in the next step—identifying your dream signs.

A dream sign is something that repeats in your dreams. Therefore, the appearance of one of these recurring phenomena is a clue revealing that right now you are dreaming. The character of each person's dream signs is different. Here are some standard categories: (1) A dream sign may be a person who reappears dream after dream. (2) It may be a scenario that repeats—a conversation or an argument. (3) It may be a specific situation or environment. In the same setting you might be doing different things. (4) It may be an emotion, such as a particular emotional slant you take on a situation. (5) Anomalies or oddities are a type of dream sign. (If you were sitting at home and a raccoon walked into your living room, circled your chair three times, and then walked back out—that's possible, but *very* unlikely. It may well be an anomaly indicating that you are dreaming.) (6) Impossibilities are dream signs with an exclamation point. (If the raccoon flew into your room, sang an aria from an Italian opera, then flew back out, that would be impossible—unless you were dreaming.)

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perfectly normal, such as your workplace, your hometown, or a nearby restaurant. If some such location comes up repeatedly in your dream journal, you can look for it in your dreams.

The *people and objects* in your dreams can be signs. Have you been conversing with extraterrestrials—or with your dog (who answers back)? Are some of the people in your dreams now deceased—a relative or famous person? Do you have coffee with Frank Sinatra or John F. Kennedy? Finally there are repeated *emotions,* such as my travel anxiety from long ago. Certain situations may trigger dread or desire or disbelief in a manner that is unusual or different from your normal daytime emotional responses. Of course there are other possible categories, but these will serve to get you started.

Developing a Critical Reflective Attitude

The motive for becoming familiar with your dream signs is to trigger lucidity within your dreams. By logging a sufficient number of dreams in your journal and extracting a list of dream signs, you eventually get a useful and quite interesting picture of your dream life. The point of this—in terms of dream practice—is not to analyze your dreams in order to discover psychological patterns as is done in traditional psychoanalysis or Jungian dream work. Although you may pick up quite a lot of new information about your psyche in the process of recording your dreams, the learning in this tradition comes from the activities and insights of lucid dreaming itself. For instance, through psychoanalysis you may discover that you have a hidden fear of some object, person, or situation, and you may discover its origin, say, in a childhood trauma. In lucid dreaming you may not only discover such a hidden fear but also be able to confront that fear lucidly in your dreams—repeatedly—and overcome it. For example, you may forgive and be forgiven by placing yourself in a replica of an original situation that

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a particular color, hearing music, looking at yourself in the mirror, tying your shoes. Try to have your list cover activities that involve all of your senses. Then choose four or five for each day of the week, at random. At the beginning of each day, memorize the handful of activities listed for that day, and the first time you perform that activity, you are to notice it immediately and then perform a state check. For instance, if your activity is to notice the first time you walk through a door, and your state check is to jump up in the air, that is what you will do. As a slight variation, when you catch yourself performing one of your targeted activities, you can first ask yourself, "Am I dreaming or not?" and then jump into the air.

Aside from jumping into the air, there are other reliable state checks to determine if you are dreaming or not. Research has shown that by reading something once, looking away, and looking back at the same material, the chances are 85 percent that in a dream the words will change. The same is true for digital clocks and watches. If you look at a digital timepiece in a dream, turn away, then look back, the chances are high that the numbers will have changed. You can also try pulling your nose. In a dream, doing this will often cause your nose to grow, like Pinocchio's.

By performing state checks on a daily basis, you will instill the habit of doing the same things in a dream. Walking through a doorway may not be an oddity—whether in daytime or dreaming—but it may happen frequently in your dreams. If you were to get into the habit of performing a state check each time you walked through a doorway, even of merely asking yourself, "Am I dreaming or not?" sooner or later you will do the same thing in a dream. By training in this way you will reinforce the possibility of making state checks when dream signs, oddities, anomalies, and impossibilities occur in your dreams. You notice there are two suns in the sky, you ask, "Am I dreaming or not?" and you trigger lucidity. This training, as we saw in the previous chapter, is what Stephen LaBerge calls MILD—Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams.

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in comparison to earlier cycles. That means that when you awaken there is a good chance that you will be coming out of a dream of some length. Upon awakening set your alarm for ninety minutes later and go back to sleep with a strong resolve to become lucid. You can also try to lucidly reenter the dream you have just left, remembering and visualizing some of its details. If by now you have become skilled at remembering your dreams, this will come easily.

Continue in this manner, waking up in ninety-minute intervals and trying either to fall asleep into a dream lucidly or to prime yourself to recognize anomalies and dream signs. You come out of the dream awakened by the alarm, pause to reset your alarm, then use your momentary awakening to prime the lucid state upon reentering dreams. If your bedtime were 9 P.M., you would set your alarm for 1:30 A.M., then 3:00, then 4:30, then 6:00, then 7:30, and so on. Of course you can lengthen or shorten the total time. If you follow this practice you will soon discover for yourself that prime time for dreaming is in the later sleep sequences. It becomes much easier to enter dreams lucidly in those periods.

A second practice makes additional use of this fact. When you have time to sleep in, for instance on a weekend or holiday, take advantage of that by sleeping an additional ninety-minute sequence or two. If you are able to sleep that much, you will be having proportionately longer dreams in the later sequences, increasing your chances of becoming lucid. Once you have become proficient in lucid dreaming, these times will give you an opportunity to apply your skills and interests within long lucid dreams.

A third practice requires that you awaken well into the night and then remain awake for thirty to forty-five minutes before going back to sleep. Set your alarm to wake you after you have gone through several sleep cycles. Then get up and read something stimulating. The intention is to become very clearheaded. It would be most helpful if you were to read something associated with lucid dreaming so as to prime your interest in

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and whatever thoughts, emotions, images, and other kinds of mental phenomena arise in that domain of experience. The goal is to simply observe this passing parade without becoming involved—without cultivating, investigating, being attracted to, encouraging, or rejecting any mental phenomena that appear in your mind. You maintain an even, calm presence whether those phenomena come fast and furious or few and far between. You have no preference as to what might appear. Just attend to whatever arises.

Using this practice as a complement to lucid dreaming makes perfect sense. Settling the mind in its natural state closely parallels the act of lucid dreaming. When you practice settling the mind in its natural state, you are becoming lucid to the mental activity of the waking state. You recognize these mental events as mental events, not mistaking them for events in the outer, intersubjective world. Normally we are as caught up in and carried away by our mental activities in the daytime as we are in the nocturnal mental activity we call dreaming. Rarely do we step back and simply observe our minds in action, becoming cognizant of the nature of the reality we are experiencing in the present moment. It makes sense, then, that if you can become lucid in your daytime experience, this will greatly facilitate lucidity when you're dreaming. Settling the mind in its natural state can also be effective for reentering dreams when you awaken at night.

Meditation Session for Settling the Mind in Its Natural State

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Begin by settling the body in its natural state and the respiration in its natural rhythm as described in the first shamatha session in chapter 1:

Choose any comfortable **posture**—supine, seated cross-legged, or seated on a chair. If you are seated, be sure that your spine is straight and that your sternum is slightly uplifted so as

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mind, attending to whatever arises therein without reactivity, without judgment, without distraction or grasping.

You may experience intervals in which you are unable to detect any thought, image, or other mental event. Yet you still have an object of meditation: during those intervals between thoughts simply attend to—with discerning mindfulness—the vacuity of the space of the mind. You are attending both to the stage and to the players on the stage. So when there are no players, attend to the stage.

When you notice that you have become distracted—falling into the habits of becoming involved with thoughts, encouraging new thoughts, emotions, or images, reacting to mental phenomena—step back gently into the mindful and passive observation of the mental flow.

After twenty-four minutes, bring the practice to a close.

OUTLINE OF THE PRACTICE:

- Posture: your choice (supine, seated cross-legged, seated on a chair)
- Body: settled in its natural state
- Breathing: settled in its natural state
- Attention: on the space of the mind and whatever mental events that arise in that domain of experience[2]
- When distracted: relax, release whatever captivated your attention, then return your awareness to the space of the mind and its contents
- Length: one ghatika (twenty-four minutes)
- Intention: to attend to mental phenomena with lucidity as a preparation for lucid dreaming; to develop concentration using mental phenomena as the object of attention

Putting It All Together

The three essential requirements for learning to dream lucidly are (1) adequate motivation, (2) correct practice of effective

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Proficiency in Lucid Dreaming

Extending Your Lucid Dreams

By now you may have had a few lucid dreams. In the beginning your biggest problem may have been getting used to the thrill of suddenly finding yourself awake in a dream, so that your excitement didn't immediately awaken you. You have probably floated or flown around in your dreams, defying the law of gravity. Perhaps you have noticed how numbers and letters in the dream world usually change when you look at them a second time. These are, of course, two of the main state checks you can use to determine if you are dreaming or not. Likely, at some point not far into your dream, the scenario has either suddenly or gradually broken up or faded and you've awakened. Or your attention has faded and you have either lost lucidity—being swept into ordinary dreaming—or you have blacked out into dreamless sleep. These are the two main obstacles to extending lucid dreams: losing your lucid awareness of the dream and losing the dream itself.

Keeping the Dream Alive

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Lucid dream research suggests that the fading or break-up of dreams into either the waking experience or into dreamless

dreamless sleep to fade out. So the key to stabilizing a dream that starts to become shaky is to heighten your engagement with the dream itself.

Keeping Lucidity Alive

Loss of lucidity means, in essence, that you have lost touch with the reality of your situation. Instead of maintaining awareness that you are dreaming—that your body is lying motionless in bed while you are awake to your dreams—you once again believe the dream is real. It is amazing how easily this can happen. Even in the most bizarre dream circumstances, the sluggishness of untrained dream consciousness uncritically accepts everything. If you were in Denver one moment and Los Angeles the next, and you begin to question that, the voice of dream dullness will justify it—successfully—with thoughts like, "Oh yeah. I must have taken a plane," or "I must be mistaken about having been in Denver," and so forth. So maintaining the critical reflective attitude that is the main support for lucidity in dreaming requires a great deal of vigilance, because you are going against one of the strongest habits of human life—snug, comfy "sleepy time." We love to curl up our bodies and shut down our minds at bedtime—just like cats and dogs do—and we've been doing it all our lives.

Of course, the more you **train in shamatha,** the less likely you are to lose lucidity in dreams. The simple practice of following your breath requires that you avoid the ingrained tendency to follow thoughts obliviously. Beyond basic shamatha, settling the mind in its natural state, as shown previously, is precisely the maintenance of a critically reflective attitude. If you are accustomed to this in daytime—and especially if you can gain some mastery, making it a habit—you will have less trouble maintaining lucidity at night.

The most basic way to ensure that you maintain lucidity in dreams is to **repeat to yourself frequently, "This is a dream,"**

dreamless sleep to fade out. So the key to stabilizing a dream that starts to become shaky is to heighten your engagement with the dream itself.

Keeping Lucidity Alive

Loss of lucidity means, in essence, that you have lost touch with the reality of your situation. Instead of maintaining awareness that you are dreaming—that your body is lying motionless in bed while you are awake to your dreams—you once again believe the dream is real. It is amazing how easily this can happen. Even in the most bizarre dream circumstances, the sluggishness of untrained dream consciousness uncritically accepts everything. If you were in Denver one moment and Los Angeles the next, and you begin to question that, the voice of dream dullness will justify it—successfully—with thoughts like, "Oh yeah. I must have taken a plane," or "I must be mistaken about having been in Denver," and so forth. So maintaining the critical reflective attitude that is the main support for lucidity in dreaming requires a great deal of vigilance, because you are going against one of the strongest habits of human life—snug, comfy "sleepy time." We love to curl up our bodies and shut down our minds at bedtime—just like cats and dogs do—and we've been doing it all our lives.

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The most basic way to ensure that you maintain lucidity in dreams is to **repeat to yourself frequently, "This is a dream,"**

and catch myself thinking, "I think I've missed my flight," I'll glance out the airport window and, sure enough, there goes my plane taking off from the runway. I may know that I am dreaming and that the airport is not real, but there goes my plane anyway. You can **use anticipation consciously to maintain lucidity.** If, for instance, you think, "I bet my best friend Carl is going to walk through the door now," often that is precisely what will happen. Then you can link such self-fulfilling prophesies into sequences. "Now Carl is going to play an accordion. The accordion is going to turn into a vintage Ferrari, and we are going to drive the coast of the French Riviera. Perhaps there will be a sunset. . . . Oh look! There it is!," and so on.

This is one method of creating stories and continuity within your lucid dreams. Another way is to set up a specific intention, as in "Tonight, I am going to climb Mt. Everest." In daytime, practice anticipating that you will be dreaming the mountain climb. Look at pictures of Mt. Everest, read about those who have climbed it, flip through catalogs of mountain climbing equipment, and so forth. Think of a plan for climbing the mountain—setting up your base camp, choosing a particular route, solutions to specific difficulties along the way, and so on. Set your intention strongly at bedtime, repeating over and over without any other distractions that you will find yourself at the base of Mt. Everest when you dream, and that you will then climb it following your plan. Once again you are using prospective memory—this time in an elaborate form—to reach and maintain lucidity.

Lucid Dreamless Sleep

Dreamless sleep, as we saw in chapter 2, is normally a state that we enter naturally and unconsciously and in which we remain with a very low level of awareness, if any at all. (These natural dreamless states are denoted NREM 2, 3, and 4 in the generalized sleep pattern mentioned earlier.) It is, however, a state we

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practicing open presence may enable one to break through to pristine awareness—one's buddha-nature. For those on the spiritual path, this is a major accomplishment.

The Practice of Awareness of Awareness (or Shamatha without a Sign)

One way to directly enter lucid dreamless sleep is to close one's eyes during the activities of normal lucid dreaming. This brings one immediately to the vacuity of the substrate. Another method, found in dream yoga, is to concentrate on a visualized image at the heart chakra. Below I will give a method from the practice of shamatha called awareness of awareness, which allows the meditator to gently sink into dreamless sleep lucidly at bedtime.

A Session of Awareness of Awareness: Begin as in previous shamatha sessions by settling the body in its natural state. Find a **comfortable posture**—either sitting or lying in the supine position. Then, after taking three deep, luxuriant breaths, **settle your breathing in its natural rhythm**. As you practice mindfulness of breathing, let your eyes be at least partially open and rest your gaze in the space before you, paying no attention to objects near or far. Continue breathing comfortably and gently attune yourself to the qualities of relaxation, stillness, and vigilance. Be peripherally aware of any mental phenomena that pass through your mind's eye.

Once you have attained a state that is relaxed and even, release your attention to all objects—any and all mental and physical appearances—and settle your awareness in the very state of being aware. Your awareness is not directed anywhere, neither inward nor outward, but rests naturally in its own nature. Whatever thoughts arise, release them immediately. You are allowing your awareness to settle naturally into its own nature. As you maintain this relaxed, easy vigilance, simply release any phenomena that obscure the clarity of your awareness.

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kind of practice to know what the extremes are so you can cleave a middle path between them. For this one, if you try too hard this gives rise to agitation and if you don't try hard enough you fall into dullness. Once you recognize the two extremes, you want to do something in between, which means bouncing off of those extremes more and more lightly. If you are focusing on any object, a thought or an image, this is one extreme, on the agitation side. The other extreme, which is more elusive, is sitting there with a blank mind not aware of anything. You are not attending to any object—just vegetating. What is in between is a quality of freshness because you are located in the present moment and vividly aware. You are not attending to any object at all but are aware that awareness is happening. It is wonderfully simple but subtle. It is like slipping into an old pair of shoes. When you are in it, you really know you are there. You need to develop a confidence that you know when you are doing it correctly. This is how it is done.

The Dream Lab

Once you have developed enough experience, and the frequency, stability, and vividness of your dreams reach a certain threshold, you may create dream laboratories in which to carry out activities of interest to you. If, for instance, you are keen on science, you could run thought experiments in a highly imaginative way. Many of the great scientific insights took place not during an experiment but while the scientist was being free with the imagination. Newton's apple—which reportedly gave him the idea that gravity was a force of attraction—is a prime example. Albert Einstein used imagination (of course a very well-informed imagination) to predict the outcome of experiments, some of which were performed many years after his formulations. His vision of gravity as curved space—which turned Newton's view on its head—seems to have been generated as an imaginative reframing of the question, "What is gravity?" In

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Again, the key here is stability and vividness: Most will have to increase their lucid dream time gradually to enable them to practice up to an hour in this mind-made environment without losing either the dream or its lucid quality. Vividness—the sharpness of images and their color and clarity—also takes time to develop, unless one is naturally gifted in the way many visual artists are. If you wish to meditate in the space of lucid dreaming you will begin by focusing your determination by affirming—in the same manner you learned lucid dreaming in the first place—"Tonight I will create a quiet space for meditation in my dreams."

Of course, you don't have to create anything as elaborate as a meditation cave in order to meditate while practicing lucid dreaming. If you wish to do the shamatha practice of following your breath, just imagine a dream body that breathes and follow that breathing. If you possessed the stability to create a visual image, such as a candle flame, a jewel, or even an image that is sacred to you, you could develop concentration and eventually arrive at samadhi (meditative concentration) by maintaining your attention exclusively on that image for progressively longer periods.

Another ideal meditation practice for lucid dreaming is settling the mind in its natural state. In this case, as we saw earlier, you do not alter or control any of the mental phenomena that appear to you. Since everything perceived in the dream state—thoughts, emotions, and physical objects—are mental, you simply pay attention to everything that arises without grasping, without being carried away. This will naturally strengthen your stability as a lucid dreamer since, as we saw previously, being lucid to the appearance of all phenomena—day and night—is the fundamental template for lucid dreaming. So doing this practice while dreaming has the double advantage of increasing your skill in an important, fundamental meditation technique with wide applications to spiritual practice, and also strengthening your ability to dream lucidly.

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PART TWO

Dream Yoga

5

The Universe of Dream Yoga

As we have seen, lucid dreaming is a relative newcomer in the field of modern psychology. Initially developed by specialists in sleep research—a subfield of psychology—over the past three decades it has gained enthusiastic adherents among the lay public, though most academic psychologists have expressed surprisingly little interest in this provocative line of research. That may be because it is seen as too subjective and therefore unworthy of scientific inquiry.[1] Given the malleability of lucid dreams and the variety of human interests, the range of activities one may engage in while dreaming is infinite. Lucid dreamers may view their nocturnal adventures as anything from an exotic hobby to a spiritual quest.

In contrast, the field of dream yoga is a specific spiritual practice embedded in a worldview dating back two and a half millennia—the Buddhist worldview. That universe, which is complex while at the same time well integrated, is driven by the twin goals of relieving the suffering of all beings and of hastening their enlightenment. The literature of this altruistic Buddhist psychology is immense, and within it there are numerous texts on dream yoga, not to mention oral teaching passed down over centuries. Although one need not become a Buddhist to

mistake it for the waking state and proceed through the dream in a state of delusion. Dreamless sleep entails an even subtler dimension of awareness that could be used to great advantage on the spiritual path, but it is usually so obscured by lack of clarity that we can't tap into the full potential of this consciousness. Above and beyond those three states, as we normally experience them, are numerous states of progressively more awakened consciousness that we can develop. But one is not considered to be truly "awake" until one achieves enlightenment—the state of a buddha, in which one has awakened to the deepest dimension of consciousness. For Buddhism, *that* is as awake as one can get. Until we attain the full awakening of buddhahood, we are asleep.

An Empirical Tradition

Whatever our personal definition of "awake" may be, if we wish to borrow ideas from Buddhism's dream yoga to help us awaken within our dreams, we are in luck, because several key Buddhist concepts nicely parallel modern thinking. To begin with, Buddhism is an empirical tradition—Buddhists are warned against uncritically accepting the teachings on faith alone. Rather, they are encouraged to test the hypotheses. The Buddha himself said to his monks: "Just as the wise accept gold after testing it by heating, cutting, and rubbing it, so are my words to be accepted after examining them, but not out of respect for me."[2] That statement should ring a bell for all of us brought up in the Western tradition, which is ideally based on logical reasoning, experience (i.e., experimentation), and objective, factual data. The demand for solid proof is central to our heritage, so much so that one American state (Missouri) calls itself the "Show-Me State." It wouldn't be far-fetched to call Buddhism the "show-me religion." The practices of Buddhism, including dream yoga, are there to be proven by personal experience.

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with the ultimate goal of Buddhism itself—enlightenment. Before one arrives there, however, we encounter a state of consciousness more subtle than the psyche, though not as transcendent as primordial consciousness. This second mental field, the *substrate consciousness* (Sanskrit: *alaya vijñana*),[5] is different from the subconscious of Freud and the collective consciousness of Jung. It is prior to and more fundamental than the subconscious—a sub-subconscious. As such, it is considered to be the source of the entire psyche, including what we Westerners call the subconscious. Therefore there is some overlap between the psyche and the substrate consciousness, although the latter concept presents a deeper and more detailed picture of what Western psychologists call the unconscious. This is why lucid dreamers may benefit from the theory and practice of dream yoga.

Although the substrate consciousness is unique to the individual—distinguishing it from Jung's collective unconscious[6]—for Buddhism it is the basis for subsequent incarnations. It could be said that it is not the individual that reincarnates but successive expressions of an individual continuum of a substrate consciousness. This mental stream begins to become configured at conception and is then modified by the thinking, emotions, behavior, and experiences of the individual being throughout one's life. Roughly speaking, these behaviors are stored in the substrate consciousness as karmic imprints that condition the life of the individual as well as future incarnations. Wholesome behavior imprints positive karma leading to a more positive future and possible evolution toward enlightenment. Nonvirtuous activities imprint negative karma—seeds that result in negative outcomes in the future. Therefore, the substrate consciousness is similar to a computer memory chip, where previous inputs constantly modify the present and condition the future operation of the computer. Just as the software and hardware of a computer constantly interact with and influence each other, so do the substrate consciousness and its emergent psyche causally interact with each other throughout the course of a lifetime.

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The substrate consciousness is highly conditioned, a repository of innate tendencies, karmic propensities—the basis of samsara. In contrast, primordial consciousness represents total freedom from such mental afflictions. Primordial consciousness, or ultimate *bodhichitta*, is nondual from relative bodhichitta—the wish to achieve buddhahood in order to bring all other sentient beings[7] to enlightenment. In the traditional Mahayana[8] practice of relative bodhichitta, one gradually develops great love and compassion for all sentient beings. This can be achieved through exercises that lead one to first see other sentient beings as equal in value to ourselves (a big step beyond our normally self-centered viewpoint), and finally to view other sentient beings collectively as of greater value than ourselves. Our orientation becomes one of helping others to the greatest extent possible based on the recognition of their suffering and of their potential for happiness. This training is largely conceptual. However, through the realization of primordial consciousness, great compassion and relative bodhichitta—the aspiration to achieve perfect enlightenment for the sake of all beings—arise spontaneously. You don't need to look elsewhere, outside of ultimate bodhichitta, to find relative bodhichitta.

Supports in the Quest for Enlightenment

It is of supreme importance to an understanding of Buddhism to know that the Buddha's first teaching after his enlightenment was on the subject of suffering. This teaching, given in the Deer Park at Sarnath near Varanasi, India, is called the Four Noble Truths. Stated simply, these are (1) the reality of suffering, (2) the reality of suffering fundamentally resulting from the inner cause of ignorance, (3) the reality that suffering and its causes can be eradicated, and (4) the path that leads to the end of suffering. Until the third noble truth is realized, we are bound to suffering by ignorance, which is its fundamental cause.

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Furthermore, the emptiness of all phenomena is not viewed as some absolute, underlying basis for phenomena. Search for emptiness and it too is nowhere to be found, itself empty of inherent existence. Emptiness is merely the ultimate manner in which phenomena exist. Moreover, the existence of experienced phenomena is dependent upon the sensory organs that detect them and minds that conceive of them. So in an important sense, all phenomena are co-emergent with the modes of awareness that apprehend them. To the mind of a bird, the object that we call a "mosquito" is a type of food. To humans a mosquito can be anything from a wonder to an irritant to a danger (especially if it carries a dangerous disease). To a mosquito, we humans are food—a source of blood needed to fertilize the female mosquito's eggs. But what is the absolute meaning of "mosquito"? The mosquito is empty of any ultimate or absolute meaning. Emptiness is nothing more than the lack of inherent existence that becomes evident when phenomena are placed under careful analysis. Emptiness is an essential feature of mentally conditioned existence. It is our ignorance of this feature that leads us astray and is a main source of suffering. By believing in the intrinsic existence of phenomena we, in a sense, take things too seriously. We will become more deeply acquainted with emptiness in the following chapters.

Since treading the Buddhist path to enlightenment requires

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that all sentient beings may be relieved of all suffering and be brought to ultimate happiness, epitomized by the wish, "May I achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, that I may bring them all to enlightenment." Practices of bodhichitta include those where one gives other beings equal value to oneself and those where one places others entirely above oneself. For example, one guide, the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*,[9] states: "When in the company of others, I shall always consider myself the lowest of all, and from the depths of my heart hold others dear and supreme." Although this may seem from the outside to be a radical self-denial or even self-denigration, as the Dalai Lama has often stated, such a stance of cherishing others more than oneself can remove the burden of self-centeredness. If the weight of egotism can occasionally strain even a confirmed egotist—and there is plenty of evidence to that effect—it can certainly hamper those on spiritual paths requiring the tranquility derived from purity of heart.

Pragmatism

The path to enlightenment, the eradication of suffering, ethical conduct, bodhichitta, and so forth are lofty ideals. But Buddhism aims above all else to put these into practice. The Buddha practiced to achieve his enlightenment, and his ideas were always backed up by specific advice through which his students achieved some degree of realization. Faith is not enough. The practices must bear the intended fruit. Through dream yoga, the yogi can directly recognize the emptiness of the personal self and of phenomena. Dream yoga can prepare one for the after-death bardo, touched on earlier. The phenomena of this bardo can be either obstacles or aids to spiritual advancement depending on the strength and direction of one's practices in life. If one has a thorough understanding of the dream state and can control one's dreams, this can be done in the after-death bardo as well.

that all sentient beings may be relieved of all suffering and be brought to ultimate happiness, epitomized by the wish, "May I achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, that I may bring them all to enlightenment." Practices of bodhichitta include those where one gives other beings equal value to oneself and those where one places others entirely above oneself. For example, one guide, the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*,[9] states: "When in the company of others, I shall always consider myself the lowest of all, and from the depths of my heart hold others dear and supreme." Although this may seem from the outside to be a radical self-denial or even self-denigration, as the Dalai Lama has often stated, such a stance of cherishing others more than oneself can remove the burden of self-centeredness. If the weight of egotism can occasionally strain even a confirmed egotist—and there is plenty of evidence to that effect—it can certainly hamper those on spiritual paths requiring the tranquility derived from purity of heart.

Pragmatism

The path to enlightenment, the eradication of suffering, ethical conduct, bodhichitta, and so forth are lofty ideals. But Buddhism aims above all else to put these into practice. The Buddha practiced to achieve his enlightenment, and his ideas were always backed up by specific advice through which his students achieved some degree of realization. Faith is not enough. The practices must bear the intended fruit. Through dream yoga, the yogi can directly recognize the emptiness of the personal self and of phenomena. Dream yoga can prepare one for the after-death bardo, touched on earlier. The phenomena of this bardo can be either obstacles or aids to spiritual advancement depending on the strength and direction of one's practices in life. If one has a thorough understanding of the dream state and can control one's dreams, this can be done in the after-death bardo as well.

6

The Daytime Practices of Dream Yoga

The Dream Yoga Teachings of Padmasambhava

Just as one prepares during the day for nighttime lucid dreaming—doing state checks, keeping a dream journal, developing a critical reflective attitude, and so forth—the dream yogi uses daytime dream yoga practices to prepare the ground for nighttime dream yoga. For both styles of practice, if you can become lucid during the waking state and make that a habit, you will much more easily attain lucidity while dreaming. However, as we have seen, the awakening sought in dream yoga—both day and night—embraces a much wider range of experience than does lucid dreaming.

One lineage of classic teachings on dream yoga was brought to Tibet by the eighth-century Indian adept Padmasambhava. A master of all of the practices of the Buddhist "diamond vehicle," or Vajrayana, many of his teachings were passed down to future generations as *terma* (Tibetan for "treasure"), placed in the ground, in solid rock, in lakes, and even in the minds of those who later discovered these treasures, who are called *tertöns*. Padmasambhava's teachings on dream yoga given here come

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Although we usually apply it selectively, the notion of interdependence is not at all foreign to our thinking. Take a "tennis match." The validity of this term depends upon there being at least two opposing players, a tennis court, a net, the racquets, the tennis ball, and the rules of the game. It also depends on the players understanding the game and being physically equipped and in good enough health to play. If any of these interdependent factors is missing, you cannot have a tennis match as it is normally understood.

From the standpoint of Buddhist philosophy, all conditioned phenomena require three things for their existence: (1) prior causes and conditions (such as the parents who were the causes of the birth of the tennis players, or all of the work and planning that went into the construction of the tennis court and the manufacture of the racquets and balls); (2) the components and attributes of the phenomenon itself (the collection of players, court, ball, racquets, the rules of the game, and knowledge brought together to create a game of tennis, etc.); and (3) the conceptual designation that identifies the phenomena possessing these components and attributes (our labeling this collection of objects and events as a "tennis match"). Seen in this manner, a "tennis match" is merely a label, an abstraction. You can observe a tennis match, but you cannot find some independent object that is a tennis match. That is not its nature. It is a conventional phenomenon—we label it by convention, but there is no ultimate, absolute, *tennis-match-thing* to be found.

We can find many similar examples, but when Padmasambhava or other Buddhists speak of "phenomena" and call them nonexistent, they refer to everything we experience with our ordinary modes of perception.[1] Phenomena are traditionally parsed into two domains: the personal self (the "inner") and everything else—the outside world. Normally we assume that our personal selves and the contents of the outside world really exist as independent entities. We assume that when we close our eyes the outside world does not disappear until we open them

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mere designation—a label. Over millennia, Buddhist philosophers have searched systematically and thoroughly for evidence of an absolute personal self. None has been found. Buddhist contemplatives train for many years searching for this self to see whether there is any experiential evidence for its existence.

Using the same analysis we discover that objects in the outside world, large and small, are also nonexistent in the sense in which Padmasambhava uses the term. Take the "atom." The word originated with the ancient Greeks. Democritus (fourth century B.C.E.) proposed the atom as the smallest particle of matter and the building block of the material universe. Science much later discovered experimentally that the atom was composed of "subatomic particles," and these particles were then assumed to be the real building blocks of the universe—the atoms of the atom. But further experiments, especially beginning in 1900 with the advent of quantum physics, showed that the nature and existence of these particles depended in part on the human thinking that theorized their existence and determined how they were to be measured. For example, a subatomic particle such as an electron can appear as a particle in one type of experiment and as a wave in another. It is the mind of the scientist that designs these experiments, these methods of measurement. But particles and waves are entirely different phenomena—so what does this say about the electron itself? Does it exist? And if so—how? As the pioneering physicist Werner Heisenberg said: "What we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning."

The quirkiness of the electron is no single, isolated case. Mainstream physics now accepts that the basic components of the material universe have a nebulous, dreamlike quality. So "atom" becomes, like the personal self, an interdependent entity relying upon prior causes and conditions, components and attributes of the observed phenomena, and most significantly, conceptual designation—labeling, measuring, and experimentation that involves a growing list of subatomic particles and

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Furthermore, we cannot retreat to the components of objects and say that since *they* are real, what they constitute must be real. Wood is a collection of cellulose fibers and chemicals comprised of molecules that can be further analyzed down to the subatomic level—which, as we've seen, has only a tentative existence. The same of course goes for graphite, metal, and rubber. At this point we may start to envision "reality" as something far less substantial than we normally assume. Phenomena—inner and outer—seem to be magically called into existence by their labels.

It is in this sense that Padmasambhava calls phenomena nonexistent. Yet even though they are not real, appearances arise and are established, designated, and apprehended as various things. This parallels the way dream phenomena appear to be real to the deluded, nonlucid dreamer, and are seen to be nonexistent once the dreamer either becomes lucid or awakens. Lucid dreaming beckons us to awaken within our nocturnal dreams—to become aware that the dreamed persona that we think is us, along with all other dream phenomena, are illusory. Dream yoga asks us to go further, to awaken to the true nature of an analogous situation that we mistakenly call "waking reality."

The Process of Delusion

Padmasambhava continues his preamble to the instructions on daytime dream yoga: "That which is impermanent is grasped as permanent, and that which is not truly existent is grasped as truly existent." In other words, we reify—we make real to

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plex. For example, this person may have parents who think he or she is not a jerk but is an adorable person. Many other people may not call this person a jerk. The person you perceive as a jerk probably does not conceive of him- or herself as a jerk. And if you got to know this person, over time even the qualities you consider jerky might be apprehended in a different way. (Conversely, there are no doubt people out there who think that *you* are a jerk—something to which you probably would not agree.)

Obviously, when we awaken from a nonlucid dream about a jerk, the reality of that situation vanishes like smoke. Since the dreamed person was nonexistent, the label "jerk" was also imaginary. When we view people so narrowly, whether in dreams or waking reality, we invariably decontextualize—placing absolute labels where no absolutes exist. The true context for all persons and objects is interdependence. The condition of dreaming, whether it be in the night or in daytime, subsumes a form of ignorance where we can easily misconstrue appearances. Dreaming invites us to become deluded. We can either go with the flow or wake up—check it right there and realize that although the object as we perceive it appears to be real from its own side, that appearance is illusory.

In terms of our normal mode of understanding reality, analyzing phenomena in this way turns everything on its head. But even if we are, at this point, thoroughly convinced that "all phenomena are nonexistent," our present understanding is only conceptual. In Tibetan Buddhism, conceptual understanding is likened to a patch on clothing that sooner or later falls away. It is the habituation of the practice of daytime dream yoga that will allow our understanding to deepen and prepare us for an awakening that encompasses both the day and the night. To quote Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche—one of the most prominent Tibetan lamas who taught in the West—"All dream yoga is based on the one-pointedness one can maintain on the illusoriness of experience by day."[2]

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ing, memory, imagination, along with the electrochemical processes that occur in the optic nerve, must combine to produce the subjective appearance we call "red." Red roses are not red unto themselves, just waiting for us to passively perceive them. According to the prominent neurologist Antonio Damasio, "There is no picture of the object being transferred from the object to the retina and from the retina to the brain."[3] And it may well be that other kinds of retinas, optic nerves, visual cortexes, and conditioned minds—such as those of bees, or bats, or bears—give rise to a completely different experience of what we call a red rose. Which is the "real" red rose? There is none. The red rose is an illusion. From the modern neuroscientific perspective, the same is true for the objects of the other senses. So when we close our eyes, the world—in the unique form in which we view it—*does* disappear. Something is seen by others, but it isn't precisely what we see. And if those others are of other species, it may be something completely different.

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha says, "Mind precedes all phenomena." We may interpret the mind he refers to as the substrate consciousness, the continuum of awareness filled with latent tendencies, impressions, memories, habitual modes of perception, and so forth. Mind precedes phenomena in the sense that phenomena are conditioned by the substrate consciousness. It filters all, or practically all, that we perceive. When we awaken from sleep, it is said that the nightscape dissolves into the substrate. And when we fall asleep, likewise the dayscape dissolves into the same space. Note that it is appearances—not photons or sound waves—that dissolve into the substrate. Photons, sound waves, and the like are theoretical entities of science that we cannot perceive directly, so they exist relative to the systems of measurement by which they are detected and relative to the minds that conceive them. And as is demonstrated by our dreams, the substrate is a dynamo, creating one environment after another. The entire world of subjects and objects in which we are embedded—which we call "life,"

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Tibetan Buddhist teaching on daytime dream yoga[5] elaborates on these instructions, encouraging the student to "establish single-pointed meditative equipoise in the awareness, 'I have fallen asleep. This appearance is a dream. It is an illusion.'" Furthermore, you are to "place your awareness in a nonconceptual sphere, without focusing it anywhere. Then direct your mind to all the appearances of yourself and others, and think, 'All these are just appearances. They are not real.' By continually practicing in that way, at all times during and after formal meditation, appearances will always seem devoid of true existence and of fear." Now it becomes clear why the resolve and concentration derived from the practice of shamatha is essential for the successful practice of daytime dream yoga.

This practice points directly to the key difference between the daytime practices of lucid dreaming and those of dream yoga. If in daytime you complete a dozen state checks, and ten times in a row your digital clock gives you the same answer when you glance away and look back—in terms of lucid dreaming you can be 99 percent sure that you are not dreaming. And yet Padmasambhava suggests that even so, even though you are sure you are "awake," you should tell yourself you are dreaming. Padmasambhava is not inviting us to practice a self-induced illusion. He is asking us to pull the rug out from under our habitual perspective on what we are experiencing. He is reframing what it means to be awake and making this the focus of daytime practice.

Returning to the example of a nonlucid dream: as long as you are operating from the assumption that you are the person in the dream—the dreamed persona—you are stuck in that point of view. If that's who you think you really are, you've sealed the nonlucidity of your dream. You are locked into your illusory role. If a companion were to notice you are dreaming—perhaps by seeing that you are tossing and turning and mumbling and your eyes display rapid eye movement—he might whisper into your ear, "You are dreaming."[6] And just like this companion,

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The reality of primordial consciousness, or pristine awareness, is of course something that can be known. But it is not known just by carefully observing appearances, nor by the power of logic, intellect, investigation, and so forth. You could say that it can be known by the power of *faith*—but that can lead us into semantic difficulties. It's a knowing that is not simply empirical knowing by way of the senses, not a knowing by way of inference, but a knowing that is immediate, that is unmediated, nonconceptual—*intuitive*. The experience is one of pristine awareness knowing itself.

I would summarize Padmasambhava's quintessential instruction for daytime dream yoga in this way: with the power of your intuition and imagination keep on dropping back into the perspective from which it is true to say, "This is a dream." Sustain that. That will gradually break down the barriers between your normal dualistic mind and pristine awareness. So daytime dream yoga is moved by the power of intuition and sustained by the power of mindfulness.

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7

Nighttime Dream Yoga

Motivation

"When you go to bed in the evening," says Padmasambhava, "cultivate bodhichitta, thinking, 'For the sake of all sentient beings throughout space, I shall practice the illusion-like samadhi [dream yoga], and I shall achieve perfect buddhahood. For that purpose I shall train in dreaming.'" This gives us our bearings. What would be the most meaningful motivation for training in dream yoga? Try this one on for size: to benefit all beings by bringing them to enlightenment. In the context of Vajrayana and Dzogchen there is only one suitable motivation and that is bodhichitta. The aspiration is the highest and the words are emphatic: "I shall achieve perfect buddhahood." We are not saying, "Oh, I'll give it my best shot and I hope I don't die first."

Such a high motivation brings with it some far-reaching questions. Can you really dedicate yourself to achieving bodhichitta—with all that it implies—while maintaining the working assumption that when you die all bets are off? I don't know how that can possibly be realistic unless you are almost there—almost awakened when you begin this practice—or unless you downgrade bodhichitta to the mere catch phrase, "may everybody be happy." It would seem that the working hypothesis of

end of this life there is annihilation, that would be like a businessman being told that he could spend his time and energy developing his business, but that at any moment—willy-nilly—he might go bankrupt. How much drive would you have toward achieving your goal if that were your working hypothesis (as opposed to pouring your heart and soul into a business knowing that it would benefit your children and grandchildren)? So seriously taking on bodhichitta as your motivation for dream yoga practice has significant ramifications that you should investigate.

Practice

The instructions continue: "Then as you lie down, rest on your right shoulder, with your head pointed north, your right hand pressed against your cheek, and your left placed upon your thigh. Clearly imagine your body as your personal deity." This position is called the sleeping-lion posture. If you cannot arrange your bed so it is pointing north—or if you are traveling a lot and sleeping mainly in hotels—simply imagine that you are pointing north. That will do. The term "personal deity" is the translation of the Tibetan word *yidam*. This could be a deity such as Vajrasattva, Tara, or Padmasambhava, or it could be your own primary spiritual mentor, your guru. You might imagine yourself as Padmasambhava, the Dalai Lama, Karmapa, or as other great teachers such as Dudjom Rinpoche or Dilgo Kyentse Rinpoche. So use whatever archetypal form or manifestation of the Buddha, symbolically expressing those qualities of buddhahood, most deeply resonate with you, and imagine yourself in that form—imagine your body as your own yidam. (Or you can use as your yidam some other spiritual figure in whom you find inspiration. If you are a Christian you could use Jesus Christ or someone like Saint Francis of Assisi. Inspiring personalities of great spiritual integrity are to be found in all the world's

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practice. From that domain of emptiness of inherent existence you arise in the form of the deity while assuming the identity with the deity. Visualizing yourself as your personal deity, imagine that you possess those qualities of perfect enlightenment embodied in your yidam. In doing so you transform yourself and your environment into a template of enlightened awareness.[3]

Padmasambhava's specific instructions for falling asleep suggest that you "imagine that on your pillow your head is resting in the lap of your primary spiritual mentor; and vividly focus your attention on Orgyen Padma [Padmasambhava] at your throat, the size of your thumb joint, with a smiling, lustrous countenance, appearing and yet having no inherent nature." The image that you visualize appears vividly in your throat but is transparent, like a rainbow. Then, "mentally offer the supplication, 'Bless me that I may apprehend the dream-state. Bless me so that I may recognize the dream-state as the dream-state.'" You are recognizing your own Buddha-nature as Padmasambhava at your throat chakra and calling forth to your innermost awareness to bring clarity to your dreams. You are not calling upon some outside power or personality for assistance.

"Lie in the sleeping-lion position, and bring forth a powerful yearning to recognize the dream-state as the dream-state." In a manner very similar to the nighttime practice of lucid dreaming, bring forth a strong resolve, create the strong prospective memory—*Tonight I am totally resolved to recognize the dream state!* "And while so doing, fall asleep without being interrupted by any other thoughts." This is where extensive shamatha practice would be indispensable, enabling you to hold the resolve, the prospective memory, with a quiet, stable mind. "Even if you do not apprehend it at the first try, repeat this many times, and earnestly do it with powerful yearning." Clearly this is a challenging agenda: to fall asleep while visualizing Padmasambhava in your throat chakra, making the resolutions, and holding the visualization, not allowing any static or interference from other extraneous thoughts to interfere.

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There are simpler alternative visualizations that can be used for direct entry into the dreamscape. You may imagine a red *bindu*—a glowing red pearl of light—in your throat. The white syllable *AH*, which symbolizes emptiness, can be imagined as well. You can use the Tibetan letter for this syllable, the Sanskrit, or the English transliteration "AH." But the essence of this practice is to focus your awareness on the throat chakra, visualize it there—give it form. By doing so you are crystallizing something, your awareness is taking on a form, you are converging the vital energies there. When you visualize a specific seed syllable or even hear its sound, by bringing in these archetypical forms not only are you channeling vital energy to that chakra, you are configuring that energy so it will be of use for dream yoga. The vital energies will help to bring your waking consciousness down from the head to the throat, leading you as directly as possible from the waking state to dream consciousness, and doing so lucidly. So that is the whole point of this procedure.

If you can generally fall asleep quite easily but you still find that trying to maintain a visualization prevents you from falling asleep, then you might try settling the mind in its natural state as you lie in the sleeping-lion posture and slip into sleep. If you can maintain the clarity of your awareness as you doze off, you may enter the sleep state lucidly. And from there you may emerge knowingly into a dream—lucid from the very beginning. But if you normally find it hard to fall asleep, all the above practices may keep you awake. In that case, gently attend to the sensations of your breath and get a good night's sleep. After all, if you can't fall asleep, you can't dream, in which case dream yoga is out of the question!

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cultivate stability and vividness of attention through shamatha, you can simply carry that over into your dream yoga practice and things will go more smoothly. That's why Padmasambhava taught shamatha first and dream yoga afterward.

The Core Practices of Emanation and Transformation

The essential practices of dream yoga employ lucidity while dreaming to develop a direct understanding of the nature of phenomena. Padmasambhava says, "While apprehending the dream state, consider, 'Since this is now a dream body it can be transformed in any way.' Whatever arises in a dream, be they demonic apparitions, monkeys, people, dogs, and so on, meditatively transform them into your personal deity. Practice multiplying them by emanation and changing them into anything you like."

You could call this the "sorcerer phase" of dream yoga. You are in the dream, you know that you are dreaming, you are maintaining the continuity and clarity of the dream itself and the continuity of your awareness of dreaming. Knowing that all appearances are just emanations of the substrate—that there's nothing there substantial from its own side subjectively or objectively—you can simply start modifying whatever you like within the dream. Some things, like flying, are easy and very malleable. By now you have probably logged plenty of flight time. At this stage, the classic procedure is to transform the one into many and the many into one. Try that with any object that appears, including yourself. If you see a cocker spaniel in your dream, create a dozen. If you see a flock of pigeons, reduce them to a single bird.

Next shift the size of objects—small into big and big into small. Turn a planet that fills your visual field into the same object the size of a golf ball. Magnify an ant to the size of a mountain. Then shift the shape and identity of objects. Turn the

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lives. If we had been angelic in all of those lives—our actions always positive and virtuous, generating only positive karma—we would be enlightened by now. So we must deal with some of the gnarly aspects of our being. One form of this, which appears both in dream yoga and in deep shamatha practice, is *nyam*, Tibetan for "meditative experience." Of course there is an extraordinarily wide range of such experiences. A nyam is an anomalous, transient psychological and/or somatic experience that is catalyzed by proper meditation. So it is anomalous—something out of the ordinary. It's transient—it probably doesn't last more than a few hours or at the most a couple of days. It may manifest in the body as nausea, as vertigo, as bliss, all kinds of somatic experiences, or, psychologically, as depression, paranoia, burgeoning faith, reverence, tears, sadness, and so on. Note that it is catalyzed by *proper* meditation practices and is a sign of progress, to be distinguished from experiences triggered by wrong-headed meditative practice.

The more intense the practice, the better it is to have on call a qualified meditation teacher. When nyam arise, be sensible: Ask yourself, "Could this be a medical condition?" If the answer is "maybe," go to a doctor. When you are sure it is nyam, just let it be. Simply be present with it without generating hope or fear. If it is nyam it will just pass on through. Genuine nyam are a good sign—you are practicing well and correctly—and passing through these phases properly is a process of purification.

The deepest levels of the practice of transformation and emanation may catalyze the nyam of fears. For some object to evoke fear in the mind there must be a dense, intractable reification taking place. The object is grasped as absolutely threatening. "Apprehend the dream-state and go to the bank of a great river," says Padmasambhava. "Consider, 'Since I am a mental body in a dream, there is nothing for the river to carry away.' By jumping into the river you will be carried away by a current of bliss and emptiness." Because the practices of dream yoga (and of

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Breaking Through to Primordial Consciousness

In *Natural Liberation,* Padmasambhava presents an advanced practice for recognizing pristine awareness in the dream state. Utilizing this, students who have already fully accomplished shamatha and *vipashyana*[7] may be able dwell in *rigpa,* or pristine awareness, in the dream state. However, a person lacking these prerequisites may also attain glimpses of primordial consciousness by allowing awareness to descend into the substrate consciousness, using the methods presented in chapter 4 (closing one's eyes during a lucid dream, falling asleep while meditating on a visualization at the heart chakra, and practicing awareness of awareness). When you release the dream but sustain your lucidity and your awareness dissolves from the psyche of the dream consciousness into the substrate consciousness, obviously that is an opportunity for directly realizing the substrate consciousness. But you may, in that state, practice Dzogchen in the lucid dreamless state. And by releasing all grasping in this panoramic, 360-degree open awareness, your awareness may break through the substrate consciousness and be realized as pristine awareness. It is clear from some of the earliest teachings by Prahevajra on the Dzogchen practice of *trekchö,* of "breakthrough,"[8] what you are actually breaking through is your substrate consciousness.[9]

The authentic practice of Dzogchen, however, entails much more than simply resting in "choiceless awareness" or "open presence." These practices are not even genuine shamatha practices, for shamatha always involves selective attention, not openness to all appearances. Moreover, if you're still attending to sensory appearances, your mind will never withdraw into the substrate consciousness, so you'll never achieve shamatha. Choiceless awareness and open presence are also not really vipashyana practices, for true vipashyana always involves some degree of inquiry, which those practices lack. And finally neither

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I asked her, given that she would be snowed-in from November to May, what happens in February when she might have some important practice question but no way to ask a teacher. She replied, "It's easy, I pray to my lama and then he appears in my dream and I get all my answers that way." One of the perks of samadhi is that the clarity of awareness naturally flows into the dream state. People who have attained the one-pointed samadhi that is the fruit of accomplishing shamatha start to have lucid dreams even with no specific dream training at all.

Although remembering past lives may involve deeply accessing the substrate consciousness, *siddhis* such as clairvoyance (seeing things occurring at a great distance), clairaudience (hearing things at a great distance), premonitions, and other types of "extrasensory perception" suggest access to primordial consciousness, where time and space are not barriers to knowledge. Again, deep meditation practices such as dream yoga may allow one occasional access to these paranormal perceptions. Recall the example given earlier, of some yogis I lived with up above Dharamsala, India, in 1980. These were practitioners who had been up there for ten, twenty, thirty years, so their minds had become quite transparent and subtle. A number of them discovered that precognition started to arise frequently. They believed there was no way that it could have been chance or coincidence. Once in a while, completely unpredictably every three or four weeks, a villager would hike up to where the yogis were to leave a small offering. Or if one of the yogis was not on strict retreat, a villager might come to ask a few questions during lunchtime. The yogis found that frequently the night before a villager would arrive, one of them would have a dream of the particular person who would visit. They were getting glimpses into short-term precognition.

In a more recent case, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, living at his monastery in relative isolation at about sixteen thousand feet in the Himalayas, became instantly aware of the unexpected death of one of his American students in Colorado. The stepson

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PART THREE

Bringing It All Together

8

Putting Your Dreams to Work

PREVIOUSLY I INTRODUCED the idea of creating dream laboratories. Of course to do so requires that you first gain a certain level of proficiency in lucid dreaming—that you have lucid dreams frequently, that they be of relatively long duration, and that you are able to easily create and manipulate objects and dream environments. If you have reached that plane, you are to be congratulated, because for most of us that takes time and effort.

The sheer excitement and enthusiasm of attaining such abilities can be likened to that of an artist once he or she has reached the professional level. A painter begins with some basic ability to draw or paint, but after much study and practice that person has developed a malleable technique whereby wonderful paintings can be produced with relative ease—works of art that are a vibrant response to a creative imagination. Of course this analogy holds true for any artistic or creative area.

Some of the activities for which you may choose to apply your now considerable skills in lucid dreaming and dream yoga have probably already emerged as you learned these skills. Your choices will come out of the panorama of your interests, activities, and current life challenges, along with options that will

For the aged, many of whom long to be "young again," this can be achieved during lucid dreams. Your mind may not be younger (and you may not even wish for that), but your body in the dream could be of any age you choose. This approach of compensating for and relieving a difficult situation via lucid dreaming would also be of value to those incarcerated in jails and prisons. The freedoms that they are denied in the daytime can be regained at night. One imagines that under these conditions there would be plenty of time to develop a practice like lucid dreaming.

For those who wish to explore this area using a formal approach, LaBerge offers some excellent strategies in the book mentioned above.

Psychological and Physical Healing

In the West there are numerous theories about the mind and the psyche and at least as many approaches to healing psychological problems. As we have seen, lucid dreaming and dream yoga provide an optimal means of exploring consciousness not only in terms of the psyche but from a much deeper perspective. The final phase of dream yoga—facing deep fears and letting frightening scenarios play themselves out—is an excellent means of healing the mind.

If you engage seriously with either lucid dreaming or dream yoga over a long period, you are very likely to dredge up deep and perhaps hidden fears—what the psychologist Carl Jung called the "shadow." Or, to put it simply, you will experience your worst nightmare. Whatever you fear the most will very likely show up during a lucid dream. If this is something you would prefer to avoid at all costs, then the practices of lucid dreaming and dream yoga may not be for you. However, from the standpoint of personal transformation—of freeing yourself from fear—such a nightmare may be a blessing in disguise. The gist of the practice is to "allow the worst to happen" rather than fleeing. If you

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There are no doubt other approaches that can be developed from lucid dreaming and dream yoga that accommodate themselves to the many other theories, styles, and philosophies of psychological therapy where dreams are used as an important avenue for understanding the psyche. Freud was especially keen on understanding the meaning of dreams for application to psychotherapy. In lucid dreaming, the symbols that are so important for dream analysis are fully within one's grasp—one can interact with them, question them, modify them, obtain an intimate understanding of them. So it would appear that dream yoga would add a dynamism to the therapeutic process, much as hypnosis does in some therapies.

Another possible therapeutic use of lucid dreaming would be in dealing with "unfinished business" with people and situations that cannot be approached directly. This could range from feelings of guilt or resentment toward a deceased relative, friend, or loved one to anxiety over a previous relationship where the other person(s) concerned, though still alive, may not desire contact. In either case, one is usually stuck in a psychologically uncomfortable situation with no effective means of closure. However, in lucid dreams you can conjure up the party with whom you wish to communicate in the form of an image identical to the original. You can pose questions, offer forgiveness, express your feelings, say farewell, and so forth. Of course the entire scenario emerges from your substrate. You are not speaking to the real person. But if you have no other means of, for instance, unburdening yourself of feelings of guilt, the realism of lucid dreaming could be cathartic.

As for using dreams to heal physical problems, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence, and some scientific proof, that healing the mind can positively affect the body. That potential is also suggested in the manipulation of pranic energy in advanced stages of yoga and dream yoga. Stephen LaBerge has posed the following question for future lucid dream research: "If we heal

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absence of actual movements. If you are a pianist, you could have your piano, the auditorium, and even an audience to applaud your lucidly dreamed performance.

If you are uncomfortable performing in public, the lucid dream lab enables you to rehearse that situation until you become accustomed to it. In the case of a business presentation before your boss and senior administrators, you can create an exact replica of the conference room and people it with images that match your audience. You can make them skeptical, see them becoming convinced by your arguments, and finally congratulating you on your presentation. After several such rehearsals, the actual presentation will seem "old hat" to you and you are much more likely to breeze through it having utilized lucid dreaming than you would from other visualization techniques or by attempting the presentation cold.

The topics above are no more than suggestions relating to some of the practical uses to which one can put lucid dreaming and dream yoga. More detailed information can be gleaned from published techniques designed to utilize affirmations, visualization techniques, and the like during waking hours. You need only transfer these exercises to your personal lucid dream laboratory at night. More detailed suggestions and procedures can also be found in the later chapters of Stephen LaBerge's *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming.*

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Individualized Practice and Infrequently Asked Questions

We are each unique. Since the womb, our psyches have developed constantly, their patterns and contents emerging from our experience sui generis. If we accept the idea of a substrate consciousness that has been shaped by our experiences from lifetime to lifetime since beginningless time, our uniqueness is magnified all the more. Therefore, individualized practice for lucid dreaming, dream yoga, or any other approach to spirituality is necessarily nuanced. General guidance is of course helpful, but specific knowledge gained from personal experience and advice from others—especially from an experienced teacher—is beneficial and sometimes crucial.

There are many ways to skin a cat, so throughout *Dreaming Yourself Awake* I have attempted to nuance my presentation such that alternatives are presented whenever possible. I have found that the most useful advice has come from questions and comments given me by my students. Not surprisingly, practitioners of lucid dreaming and dream yoga display a wide variety of backgrounds, philosophical views, and approaches to the topic. Below is a selection that I hope you will find beneficial.

that you would really like to cultivate, behavior you would like to modify, or your general resilience when faced with adversity. Also, what qualities would you like to see attenuated? To what extent is your spiritual practice really nurturing positive qualities? Some people may place a strong emphasis on yoga. For others everything will rotate around the Four Immeasurables or knowledge or insight or service in the world. It is important to assess and modify accordingly.

Advice on Keeping a Dream Journal

Question: I have always had lots of dreams and often write them down. I look for the ones with real power. The mundane dreams I don't bother to write down. Last night I had several dreams, but they were mundane. I thought I would wait until later to write them down, but I forgot them. Do you go to the ones that have the power or the ones that are mundane?

Response: I sympathize and agree with you. The issue of writing down every dream seems monotonous. You would have to have an enormous amount of enthusiasm. However, in the lucid dreaming context, the whole point of writing down the dreams is to enhance dream recall, without which the lucid dreaming practice will have a hard time getting off the ground. So you need a good-sized database.

Even among the mundane dreams you can determine dream signs. This enables you to gather your database in order to recognize your recurrent dream signs. And dream signs might shift, so you need to keep them updated. Also note some of the anomalies and impossibilities that arise. Once you have done this, there is not much reason to keep writing them down.

But it is also important to apply the basic techniques of not moving, of remaining physically still when you awaken, and then reverting your attention back into the dream and seeing if you can gain lucidity. In that case, even if the dream is mundane, it is perfectly good grist for the mill. If you can revert and

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luminously clear—and they say, "That's for me! This is like drugs without any of the side effects and without doing anything illegal. Give me the high."

And it is very easy when people have had a taste of that to tell themselves they want to have that experience all the time. So they may go exclusively for vividness and say, "Never mind that stability stuff, it's boring. And relaxation, that's for people on vacation." So relaxation is swept away—"Who needs that? And stability, that's just calm, that's just boring." So they go right for vividness. That happens a lot. As a result they become high-strung, they become "wired." They become emotionally very vulnerable, very unstable, and then the high doesn't last. They come out into the world and their practice completely collapses. They are oversensitive to the noise, clutter, and utter rambunctiousness of the everyday world and can't handle it.

Subtle Cues in Realistic Dreams

Question: When dreams are very realistic I have a lot of difficulty becoming lucid. One was a scene from work that happened a number of years ago. In it I met my wife in a library, which is unusual, but only subtly so.

Response: In that regard if you can find *recurrent* dream signs, that could be a cue or an anomaly—such as seeing your wife in a library repeatedly. You had a mild anomaly. Recognition of subtle anomalies is a skill to be developed. Prospective memory especially needs to be honed, and then bring in a critical reflective attitude, asking, "How odd is that?" That can be the catalyst. Develop the habit of looking for anything and everything that is outside the norm.

Reviving a Dream if Your Dream Persona Is Disembodied

Question: In some of my dreams I am disembodied—I have no dream body in the dream. I am just a presence witnessing the

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Lucid Dreaming and Purification

Question: Can one do purification practices in lucid dream?
Response: Definitely yes.

The Nature of Dreams

The Variables—Intensty and Lucidity

Question: What is the relationship between the intensity of a dream and the lucidity of a dream?

Response: By intensity we mean the acuity of the dream—the high resolution, the brilliance, the clarity, the vividness of it. The relationship between intensity and lucidity is not one-to-one. You can be lucid in a dream that is rather vague. So these are somewhat independent variables. One may have a very intense dream in which one has no lucidity at all—one is totally caught up in it. And such dreams can be very emotionally charged.

Having said that, in a dream-initiated lucid dream (DILD), lucidity is more likely to be internally catalyzed by an intense dream rather than a rather dull, vague one. That is because if there are anomalies in the dream, and most dreams do have them, then the anomalies will be more vivid, which means they are more likely to catch your attention, perhaps leading to the critical reflective attitude and the observation, "That was so strange!" And that may catalyze lucidity.

So the two are independent, and they are expressing different types of luminosity. When you speak of an intense dream, all you are really speaking about is the sheer vividness of attention displayed quite flamboyantly. It doesn't necessarily mean there is a great vividness of *cognizance.* There is also another kind of clarity, and that is the clarity of *insight.* And that doesn't

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The Sources of Dreaming

Dream Origins

Question: Dreams don't evolve entirely from the substrate. Where do the contents of dreams come from?

Response: There is some correlation to the sleep cycles, but this is just a generalization. The night can be divided into three sections. It is said that the dreams in the early part of the night (the first one or two cycles) will likely be short and conditioned by and inspired by recent events. There is often a strong correlation with events of the preceding day in the waking state. There is not much of a time buffer between them, only about ninety minutes after you fall asleep. The dream cycle is very short. The origin of this material is the psyche.

In the middle part of the night there is more of a time buffer separating you from the previous day, so you may be tapping into older memories. The origin is still the psyche. If one is going to have meaningful or precognitive dreams or remote viewing dreams (common especially if there is a blood connection with the person seen), the prime time for significant dreams is that of the final dreams at the end of the night. They are tapping more deeply into the substrate. These may be inspired by childhood dreams or even past lifetimes.

If you are tapping deeply into the substrate, you might catalyze some memory in a past life. But this does not explain precognition or remote viewing. The substrate is in conventional reality; it is local, personal, and accumulates memories. It is on a conventional, relative plane. As you are encroaching upon the substrate you are encroaching upon memories. But shafts of light from primordial consciousness may beam through, especially when there is a strong karmic relationship (teacher and student, mother and child, close friendships). It's like a wormhole stemming from

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dream state?" The answer is "definitely yes." But many other things manifest in the dream state as well. For those of you who are Buddhists, note that the process of purifying the mind from quite a deep place by way of Vajrasattva meditation, for instance, can actually catalyze karma, which will come to fruition in your dreams. And that's one way of purifying the karma, rather than having it come to full maturation in some waking state. Better to get rid of it in the dream state.

Miscellaneous Topics

Influence of Food on Meditation; Doing Back-to-Back Practice Sessions

Question: I've noticed that my meditation focus is not so sharp after eating—it bounces around. Does eating before practice generally cause problems? And what contexts are more conducive to practice?

Response: This depends on how well you digest your food and on whether you've eaten a healthy amount. You might want to let your food settle before you formally meditate. Then a combination that can be very helpful is two back-to-back sessions. They don't need to be short, whatever duration you like. Do the first session in the supine position focusing on full-body awareness and mindfulness of breathing with a primary emphasis on groundedness, the sensation of firmness of the body on the ground and overwhelmingly an emphasis on relaxation to soothe and ground the mind and body. Then after this session, sit up and do the practice of awareness of awareness. The two together—grounding and resting in the space of awareness—can be very effective.

Ethics in Lucid Dreams

Question: Can ethics be of any importance in lucid dreams? After all, if you commit some negative act there, it's all a dream. There is really no one who is harmed.

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Dreaming Yourself Awake

A Wider Perspective

In one of my first lucid dreams, I was riding in a car on a desert road and noticed the sun rising to my left, and a little while later I saw it setting in the same direction. How odd was that? Too odd! And that was what alerted me to the fact that I had to be dreaming. I knew precisely the moment I became lucid, but when did the dream start? Evidently, when that dream first began, I wasn't aware that I was dreaming, so later on I had no recollection of *what* I wasn't aware of earlier, namely the beginning of the dream. The dream began in unawareness (*avidya*), or ignorance, and since I wasn't aware of the nature of the reality I was experiencing, I came to regard it simply as "real," without drawing any distinction between waking reality and dreaming reality. So unawareness led to delusion.

The Process of Delusion

According to Buddhist philosophy, something is said to be existent if it is knowable and nonexistent if it is unknowable. We may not be aware of it yet. We may never be aware of it. But if it is knowable by anyone, it is said to exist. Or to turn this on its head: if something exists, it must be knowable by someone. In a

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to mistake our thoughts for a reality that is independent of our minds. Ignorance leads to delusion, and that easily leads to all other mental afflictions, including craving and hostility. And from the perspective of that cycle of obsessive conceptualization, there is no identifiable beginning. In the same way, whenever we are "born" into a nonlucid dream, we enter a microcosm of samsara, originating in unawareness, unfolding in delusion, and proliferating in habitual patterns of craving and aversion.

According to the Buddha's teachings, samsara has no identifiable beginning. It is said to be beginningless, but does this literally mean that each of us has had an infinite number of previous lives? If so, might we have only an infinitesimal chance of achieving liberation this time around or in any future life? That's a dismal outlook, so maybe there is an alternative to an overly literal interpretation of the "beginningless" nature of samsara. Perhaps samsara is beginningless only in the sense that its beginning is *unknowable*, as is the number of our past lives.

According to the classic teachings on the twelve links of dependent origination,[1] based on the Buddha's contemplative discoveries during the night of his enlightenment, the cycle of rebirth emerges from ignorance of central facets of reality, such as the Four Noble Truths. Out of this unawareness arise mental formations, energetic impulses that structure our being and form the basis of our character. In dependence upon those mental formations arises a partially structured dimension of consciousness that shapes the energetic activity of mental formations into more crystallized, reified forms. Once that stage of consciousness has arisen, "name and form" appear, when experience becomes bifurcated into subjectively experienced mental functions (*nama*) that are involved in naming things and objectively experienced appearances (*rupa*) that are classified and named. In this way the unity of the flow of experience subjectively arises as the identification of appearances and things (*nama*) and objectively arises as the appearances and entities that are identified. Mental cognition (*manas*) is the

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and subjective mental processes arising from the substrate consciousness.[3]

The conceptual categories of mind and matter, embedded in the large framework of the constructs of subject and object, emerge out of a flow of experience that precedes and is more primal than these concepts. Both classical Buddhism as recorded in the Pali Canon[4] and the Dzogchen tradition reject monistic materialism (the view that everything boils down to space, time, matter, and energy and their derivative or emergent properties) and substance dualism (the theory that the world is fundamentally composed of two kinds of real, inherently different entities: mind and matter). The categories of mind and matter are constructs conceived out of the flow of experience, which exists prior to the differentiation of "outer" and "inner," "subject" and "object."

The pioneering American psychologist William James proposed a similar theory that might have revolutionized the mind sciences if they hadn't subsequently been dominated by the metaphysical assumptions of materialism. He rejected that either mind or matter is a primal stuff out of which subjective and objective phenomena emerge and proposed instead that these constructs are formulated out of a flow of "pure experience," which has the potential to manifest as mind and matter.[5] While the nature of such pure experience may be explored by way of introspection and various contemplative practices, it is experimentally inaccessible to the materialistic methods of modern psychology and neuroscience. So this hypothesis has not been pursued by the scientific community. Instead, cognitive scientists rely on their objective systems of inquiry, including questionnaires, behavioral studies, and the study of neurophysiological processes. Unless scientists interview someone with direct knowledge of pure experience, they will not gain even indirect knowledge of this dimension of consciousness and are therefore likely to remain trapped in their unquestioned and

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surement and conceptual modes of inquiry. Indeed, many quantum physicists adhere to the maxim *do not attribute existence to that which is unknowable in principle.* The universe as it exists independently of all systems of measurement is a prime case of something that is unknowable in principle. So we have no reasonable grounds for asserting its existence, and even if we do, we are affirming the existence of something about which we know nothing except that it must exist—and that's a marginal kind of knowledge at best.

In quantum physics it is widely accepted that prior to making a measurement, the system to be measured exists in a state of quantum superposition, mathematically described as a probability wave. It is important to recognize that the probability wave is not something objectively out there, waiting to "collapse" when a measurement is made. Rather, it is a mathematical description that pertains to the probabilistic results of making a measurement. Before the measurement takes place, there are no discrete elementary particles with objectively real locations or velocities in the system to be measured, and nothing can be said about what is really there objectively. Actualization of these particles and their properties occurs only with the act of measurement.

Applying the principles of quantum physics to the universe at large, Hawking suggests that before making measurements, every possible version of a single universe exists simultaneously in a state of quantum superposition. When scientists choose to make a measurement, they select from this range of possibilities a subset of histories that share the specific features measured. This implies that the universe did not evolve in an absolutely unique and real way prior to the measurements we make in the present. Scientists decide what measurements to make, and the information that is provided by those measurements provides the basis for the descriptions they formulate about the past. The history of the universe as they conceive of it exists relative to the measurements they have conducted, but not independently of

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There Is No Universe without Consciousness

There is no such thing as information without the presence of a conscious agent who is informed and without the presence of something about which that agent is informed. Likewise, there is no informed subject without the presence of information, and there is nothing about which one is informed if there is not the act of being informed and someone who is informed. The three—the informed subject, the imparting of information, and the object about which one is informed—are all mutually interdependent. So, from one perspective it is still true that matter gives rise to information, which gives rise to observers; and from another perspective, it is the observer who gives rise to information, from which matter is conceived. That, in short, is Wheeler's "strange loop," in which we humans are observer-participants who co-create the world of our experience, while uncritically assuming that it already exists out there, independent of our participation. Our waking reality is therefore like a nonlucid dream, from which we awake only when we recognize the extent of our participation in the creation of the world we experience.

Over the past four hundred years since the rise of modern science, the first great scientific revolution took place in the physical sciences in the seventeenth century. When Darwin initiated the second great scientific revolution in the nineteenth century, he could only conclude that life originated from and evolved due to physical processes, for those were the only ones scientists knew anything about. And when the mind sciences began to develop in the late nineteenth century, cognitive scientists had no alternative but to assume that consciousness and all subjective experiences arose from biological processes, for scientists at that time knew only about inorganic and organic physical processes. The history of science moves from advances in physics to biology to psychology, and this sequence is exactly replicated on a cosmic scale in scientists' depiction of the history of the universe:

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brain, so it is easiest for them to embrace the first of the above theories, namely, that the brain produces all subjective experiences. But since all known mind-brain correlations are compatible with all three hypotheses, it follows that there is no empirical evidence that the first hypothesis is uniquely true.

James believed that when brain function ceases at death, the individual stream of consciousness that it configured vanishes, but a more fundamental dimension of consciousness from which it emerged would continue.[9] Many scientists might argue that there is no evidence to support this hypothesis, but since all the evidence, or information, neuroscientists have about consciousness is based on brain activity, this reasoning is completely circular. If you ask only physical questions and make physical measurements pertaining to consciousness, you will get only physical answers, and the conclusion that consciousness is totally dependent on brain function is inevitable. In other words, one's starting assumption and all one's subsequent measurements lead to only one possible conclusion, which is identical to one's initial assumption.

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Buddhism, the origin of ordinary human consciousness is also shrouded in unawareness. Just as primordial consciousness manifests as the clear light of death immediately during the dying process, so does it manifest as the clear light of birth at the time of conception. But for ordinary beings, this pristine awareness flashes by unrecognized, and it is immediately eclipsed by the unconscious emergence of the substrate. Karmic energies then catalyze this immaterial vacuity, out of which the substrate consciousness emerges, and during the formation of the fetus, the human mind forms in dependence upon the developing nervous system.

The scientific search for the neural correlates of consciousness—which has met with little success—is based on the uncorroborated assumption that consciousness emerges from complex interactions of neuronal activity. The hypothetical neural correlates of consciousness are presumed to constitute the minimal degree of such activity needed to generate consciousness. But contrary to the materialistic assumption, if consciousness is simply configured by brain activity, rather than being produced by it, this scientific quest is in vain, for it is based on a false assumption. When scientists speculate about the origins of consciousness on our planet, once again they present only uncorroborated assumptions but not scientifically testable hypotheses. The necessary and sufficient causes and conditions for the emergence of consciousness are simply unknown by the scientific community, so it is equally ignorant about what happens to consciousness at death. Lacking any means to test any nonphysical hypotheses about the nature and origins of consciousness, scientists rely solely on their physical measures, which inevitably lead to physicalist theories of consciousness.

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Some teachers of Buddhism go so far as to deny that the Buddha even claimed to have direct insight into the reality of rebirth and karma. We are all perfectly free to believe whatever we like, and the Buddha himself encouraged his followers to put all his teachings to the test of reason and experience. But on the basis of unprofessional scholarship driven by personal biases, some Buddhist revisionists re-create the Buddha according to their own ideas and personal experience and then "take refuge" in their own fantasies about who the Buddha *really* was and what he *really* taught. On the one hand, this misrepresentation of the Buddha's life and teachings may seem harmless—people have the freedom of speech to teach and write whatever they like. But, on the other hand, if it is fraudulent for street peddlers to sell cheap Rolex knockoffs as the real thing, it is just as fraudulent for teachers to peddle their own speculations as authentic teachings of the Buddha.

This does not mean that one must accept Buddhist theories about consciousness before one can venture into Buddhist practice. The Buddha never demanded that his followers believe anything he said. All that is traditionally required of students of Buddhism is to be open-minded, perceptive, and devoted to seeking liberation through the cultivation of insight and understanding.[12] Through such practices as shamatha, vipashyana, and Dzogchen, those with strong determination, who are willing to devote their lives to such inquiry, may put the Buddhist hypotheses to the test of experience and reason. Those who lack such dedication may simply remain agnostic (unknowing), but they should bear in mind that in the Buddhist view, unknowing, or ignorance, is the root of samsara, not the path to liberation. Others may develop sufficient confidence in the integrity of Buddhist contemplatives over the centuries that they come to trust their insights. In the modern world, such trust is com-

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1. Such a high degree of concentration is called "one-pointedness" (Sanskrit: *ekāgratā*).
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